

CLOSE UP

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AS IS

BY THE EDITOR

Effort at universal cinema has well shown that the only approach to it is strictly racial cinema.

We have seen that the only way to understand peoples is in their essence, not—as has been tried and tried again—their compounding. Seeing that internationalism is the aim, clearly the first necessity is nations. A brotherhood between nation and nation is founded not on one nation taking over the characteristics formed from the other's peculiar growth and development, but upon a higher understanding and respect. This in cinema above all else has been well proved. If instead of nations we have peoples imitating the diluted moral esperanto of other peoples, in the end there is neither understanding nor justification for the continuance of irrelevance.

When Ralph Forbes and Lilian Gish are cast as Austrians and directed in an Austrian scenario by an American director in Hollywood, we have neither America nor have we Austria.

CLOSE UP

Austrians go white and leave the theatre while Americans are merely sceptical, sensing rightly that this American Tragedy has taught them nothing of Austria, nor for that matter of America. When Pabst, an Austrian, opens your eyes to Vienna broken by war and war's end, you understand so much more not only about Vienna but about casual villainy in general and much about humanitarianism. It makes you aware of Austria. And—this is important—Austria as a nation. Its story in evoking sympathy, wakes sympathy for Austria as Austria and not as something badly imitating *you*.

It is the same when Margaret Mann sends four Tyrolean, country boys to war. What is her "Universal Message" of motherhood (what was Poirier's) but her director's ability to make her look sentimentally forsaken, waving her over-ornate lads through over-ornate studio streets to studio war?

You don't sympathise with Russia, you have no sense of international understanding, when John Barrymore postures in a Russian story with impeccable, special, ever-softening lens to gain him sex-appeal. Let one fine, honest voice—say Eisenstein's—tell you about Russia, and supposing you are man enough not to scramble with your stocking of savings to bury in the garden; that is to say, if you haven't got that kind of mind, you will understand that none of the world has benefited by the silly tales-told-out-of-school fired competitively from miles of newspapers and millions of mouths through twelve years of unconscious (for that is what it amounts to) confession.

What does friend Borzage get from his attempt to put Italy on the International map? One of the all too few bright moments of the Mussolini campus—the storming of projection

CLOSE UP

room and burning of the film. Long live Italy, if you feel that way about it, though clearly aesthetic motives are not to be ascribed. I won't tell you, by the way, which famous German cameraman considered this daubed, unedged, grey soupiness the best photography, *mein kind*, the world has ever seen!

Now take (since everybody else does) the negro film and decide whether you think international cinema is here going to mean a thing when a white man directs, no matter how charmingly, blacks so that they must always seem to be direfully dependent on white man's wisdom. For all the coal black hearts in Dixie must beat to please,—meekly Uncle—Tom, pleasant, thankful serf beats. Confronted with an instability (his own) which he calls a Race Problem, the white man is always going to portray the negro as he likes to see him, no matter how benevolently. Benevolence, indeed, is the danger. Apart from being the most tricky and unkind form of human selfishness, it is often more than humbug and always less than seeing, and does to sugar coat much that is not, so to speak, edible.

Stepin Fetchit can give us more than a promise though the trouble is he isn't meant to do as much. But watch him move and you will see what we mean. There is more than promise in the jungle, lissom lankness that slams down something unanswerable in front of what we let go past as beauty. This splendour of being is one good key to open a good many doors, all the way to our goal simply. Something has been given us here, set (if you will) in a physical symbol, though you might with equal truth call it a mind symbol or a psychic symbol. Something by which we know without any further

CLOSE UP

need to bother, that we are only at the outer edge of seeing.

Fetchit waves loose racial hands and they, like life, touch everything that the world contains. They are startling with what nobody meant to put into them, but which is all too there—histories, sagas, dynasties, Keatsian edges off things make a voiceless trouble back of the eye and the recording mind. Only afterwards you really are beset by them. They are not Fetchit's hands, they are the big step we have not yet taken. First of all these so utterly not incantationish gestures are unselfconsciousness, perfectly inherited greatness of race and of race mind. It only begins there. We can scrap every trained toe waggle of a ballerina for the very least of these movements. Making this greatness articulate for the cinema is the fascinating pioneer work of somebody.

Ourselves we should be dubious of white man's patronage. White man's patronage is apt to end in credos. The negro is apt to be overlooked in the hullabaloo of me being distinguished by shaking my brief for him under *your* nose. Constraining, alas, people like Wyndham Lewis to be stung into Palefaced and paler gutted repudiation. And where if you please is the negro all this time, other than in his own world and among his own people, unaware he is being broken like bun in the twittering fingers of so many hundred thousand drawing room tea fights. Glory be is only your maiden aunt's shudder the other side up. The negro is not here to be thus not understood and let go. Glory be helps him no more than nothing and solves nothing. Analysis has not begun yet.

Big issues are at once opened up. In being dazzled by the hands of Fetchit do not let us overlook the head of Fetchit.

CLOSE UP

It is the negroid in Fetchit which is most sheerly fine. Race. The national, if one may bring it in terms of our contention. Negro being white John Citizen (excuse me) can now be brought in line with what we have said about Margaret Mann and her four no more Tyrolean than I am boys. The negro does not have to come to us for civilization, culture or religion. Periodically we (the white races) are shown we are neither civilized, cultured nor religious. It would hardly be progress for those who have retained what Fetchit, the symbol, has retained, to lose it for regimented, squad-drill tactics of our minds and bodies. The negro's civilization is capable of less pinched, less wary, less unhappy types.

No, we have not come to the beginning of understanding. Our idea of the Orient is as oriental as the cotton bedroom kimonos in any sales catalogue. Our idea of the negro is as negroid as Al Jolson and no more. We sentimentalise about the negro, we admire him, we shout hurrah, as it might be, when he is mentioned—some of us still walk out of the room when he comes in—and how far if so little we understand ourselves do we understand him?

I have seen people brace their shoulders and spit without the grace and justification of a cat at his mention in casual conversation. A boat has just brought me back from the north of the world. The most blotched of the blotched harridans from Wigan was heard to remark that the Laplanders had horrible faces. Fat folds of evil and repression sat on her funny little mouth. Her eyes were the eyes of boiled trout, steaming wanly through pince-nez. Every time the boat lurched, ungoverned, flapping knees twitched and she belched. In the faces of the Lapps was the

CLOSE UP

quiet, earthy grandeur of free little gnomes and reindeer ran among them.

Let the negro, then, film himself, be free to give something equal to his music, his dance, his sculpture—in which alone you have a clue to new visual discovery, as trenchant in its way as the first shock of what is now broadly referred to as the Russian method.

The negro documentaire of the negro. Think what might be in it. The negro as an observer of himself. As his own historian. As his own agitator. Talking films took films from us but they have given us a glimpse of him, and the momentous edge of possibility is set punkah-fashion waving, fanning something entirely and wholly new, that may expand not in the negroid alone, but throughout the whole of a rationalised international cinema.

KENNETH MACPHERSON.

THE NEGRO ACTOR AND THE AMERICAN MOVIES

BY GERALDYN DISMOND

—well-known American Negro writer.

The Negro actor and the part he has played in the development of the American movie is one of the most

CLOSE UP

interesting phases of what is now one of America's greatest industries. Because no true picture of American life can be drawn without the Negro, his advent into the movies was inevitable; but also because of the prejudices which have hampered and retarded him since his coming to America, his debut was delayed. To be perfectly frank, the Negro entered the movies through a back door, labelled "servants' entrance". However, beggars cannot be choosers, and it is to his credit that he accepted the parts assigned to him, made good and opened the door for bigger things.

In order to better appreciate the attitude of the white producer toward Negro talent, we must keep in mind the change in the social status of the group. To put it briefly, at the time of the Civil War, the northern white man considered the Negro a black angel without wings, about whom he must busy himself in spirit and deed. On the other hand, the southern white man detested Negroes in general and liked his particular blacks. After the Negro had been given his freedom, there soon arose the feeling that he was an economic and social menace and we find him depicted everywhere as a rapist. Then the white dilettante, exhausted with trying to find new thrills, stumbled over the Negro and exclaimed, "See what we have overlooked! These beloved vagabonds! Our own Negroes, right here at home!" And voila!—Black became the fad.

These types of thinking have influenced the development of the Negro as part of the moving picture game. Within the remembrance of all of us and still in some pictures and stage productions, we find whites blacked up for indifferent

CLOSE UP

imitations of their dark brothers. But more and more is the practice falling into disrepute. The old cry that Negroes with ability cannot be found has not held water. In fact, it has been conclusively proven that under the proper director, the Negro turns out some of the best acting on the American screen and stage. A people of many emotions with an inherent sense of humour, and a love for play, they do not find it difficult to express themselves in action, or to bring to that expression the genuineness and enjoyment they feel. Nevertheless, excuse after excuse has been made to keep the Negro off the silver sheet and it was the servants of white stars, who as individuals, first got the breaks.

For example, Oscar Smith, who came to the Paramount Studios nine years ago as the personal servant of Wallace Reid, and at present owns the bootblack stand at the studio, has worked in two hundred pictures and has recently received a contract exclusively for Paramount talking pictures. Stepin Fetchit, who is billed as the star in the William Fox all-talkie *Hearts in Dixie* was the porter on the Fox lots. Carolyn Snowden, who played opposite Fetchit in *In old Kentucky* was also a lady's maid for a prominent star. And so it went. Another point is also true. They worked in the early days in character. By that I mean, often the star's maid went on as her maid, provided she could be made to look homely and black enough. And all Negroes, perhaps with one or two exceptions, were cast as menials and as comedy characters.

As for the exceptions, they were for the most part African chiefs and the members of their tribes. One, however, I do

CLOSE UP

recall from my first experiences with movies. He is Noble Johnson of whom practically nothing is heard now in connection with Negroes. The last time I saw him, he was playing the part of a Mexican bandit, and rumor has it that he owns considerable stock in the company for which he works and is used for all parts calling for a swarthy skin. The other two unusual individuals are Sunshine Sammy and Farina, the two juvenile favourites of the Hal Roach—Our Gang Comedies.

Negroes in any great numbers were first used for atmosphere—for mobs, levee and plantation, native African jungle and popular black belt cabaret scenes. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, which, by the way, employed the old rape idea, and for that reason was so distasteful to Negroes, is an excellent example of the Negro as atmosphere. *West of Zanzibar*, a popular Lon Chaney film, and the *Stanley in Africa* pictures used large groups of Negroes for the jungle scenes.

The next move on the part of producers was evident. Isolated Negro characters and Negroes as atmosphere were combined for the Universal feature production, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, with James B. Lowe as Uncle Tom. Not all Negro parts, however, even in this picture, were assigned to Negroes. Topsy, Liza, her husband and baby were played by whites, but up to the introduction of the "Talkies", *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the outstanding accomplishment of the Negro in the movie world.

It is significant that with the coming of talkies, the first all-Negro feature pictures were attempted by the big

CLOSE UP

companies. White America has always made much of the fact that all Negroes can sing and dance. Moreover, it is supposed to get particular pleasure out of the Negro's dialect, his queer colloquialisms, and his quaint humour. The movie of yesterday, to be sure, let him dance, but his greatest charm was lost by silence. With the talkie, the Negro is at his best. Now he can be heard in song and speech. And no one who has seen the William Fox *Hearts in Dixie*, featuring Stepin Fetchit, Clarence Muse and Eugene Jackson, or Al Christie's *Melancholy Dame*, an Octavius Roy Cohen all-talking comedy with Evelyn Preer, Eddie Thompson and Spencer Williams, will disagree with the fact that the Negro's voice can be a thing of beauty in spite of the mechanics of this new venture in the art of the movies.

Of these two Negro all-talkies which are now playing Broadway, *Hearts in Dixie* is by far the most pretentious. The story as such, is nil. Here indeed, we have the "beloved vagabond". It does embody the idea, however, that some Negroes are not superstitious and are anxious to better themselves, and is a rather entertaining picture of plantation life; but it lacks substance. You were ever conscious of the fact that the producers were not interested in the plot, but rather in the talking and singing sequence. The ensemble singing and the voice of Clarence Muse were decided contributions and well worth the price of admission. *The Melancholy Dame*, a short comedy with little music or dancing, depends principally upon its comic dialogue which is given in the best Octavius Roy Cohen dialect, for its interest. Incidentally, Mr. Cohen, himself, directed the picture.

CLOSE UP

Of course, it is generally believed that the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer production, *Hallelujah*, will be the ace of the all-Negro talking pictures. King Vidor is directing. Daniel Haynes, formerly of *Show Boat*, has the principal role and is supported by Nina May McKenney of the Blackbirds of 1929; Victoria Spivey, a "blues" recording artist; Fannie DeKnight, who played in *Lula Belle*; Langdon Grey, a non-professional, and 375 extras. There are forty singing sequences, including folk songs, spirituals, work songs and blues. Eva Jessye, a Negro, who has compiled a book of spirituals and trained the original "Dixie Jubilee Choir", is directing the music. The story, which is devoid of propaganda, is that of a country boy who temporarily succumbs to the wiles of a woman, is beset with tragedy, and ultimately finds peace. It is a known fact that several studios are holding up all-Negro productions until the fate of *Hallelujah* has been pronounced.

In the meantime, *Show Boat*, a talkie using the present American *Show Boat* Company of both blacks and whites, has been made by Universal and had its première at Miami and Palm Beach, March 17th; Ethel Waters, greatest comedienne of her race, and Mamie Smith, blues singer of note, have been signed up by Warner Brothers for Vitaphone comedies; Sissle and Blake, internationally famous kings of syncopation, have been released by Warner Brothers; Christie Studio is preparing another Negro film; Eric Von Stroheim is working on the Negro sequence of *The Swamp*, and John Ford's *Strong Boy* is using a large number of Negroes.

Three by-products have resulted from this slow recognition

CLOSE UP

of the Negro as movie material—Negro film corporations, Negro and white film corporations, and white corporations, all for the production of Negro pictures. They have the same motives, namely, to present Negro films about and for Negroes, showing them not as fools and servants, but as human beings with the same emotions, desires and weaknesses as other people's; and to share in the profits of this great industry. Of this group, perhaps the three best known companies are The Micheaux Pictures Company of New York City, an all-coloured concern whose latest releases are *The Wages of Sin* and *The Broken Violin*; The Colored Players Film Corporation of Philadelphia, a white concern, which produced three favorites—*A Prince of His People*, *Ten Nights in a Barroom*, starring Charles Gilpin, and *Children of Fate*; and the Liberty Photoplays, Inc., of Boston, a mixed company, no picture of which I have seen. There is rumor of the formation in New York City of The Tono-Film, an all-Negro corporation, for exclusive Negro talking pictures and that its officers and directors will include Paul Robeson, Noble Sissle, Maceo Pinkard, Earl and Maurice Dancer, J. C. Johnson, F. E. Miller and Will Vodery, all of whom are known in America and abroad. So far, the pictures released by this group have been second rate in subject matter, direction and photography, but they do keep before the public the great possibilities of the Negro in movies.

In conclusion, it must be conceded by the most skeptical that the Negro has at last become an integral part of the Motion Picture Industry. And his benefits will be more than monetary. Because of the Negro movie, many a prejudiced



From *The Black Journey*, the Paramount film of the Citroen expedition.



From *West of Zanzibar*, a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer film
directed by Tod Browning.



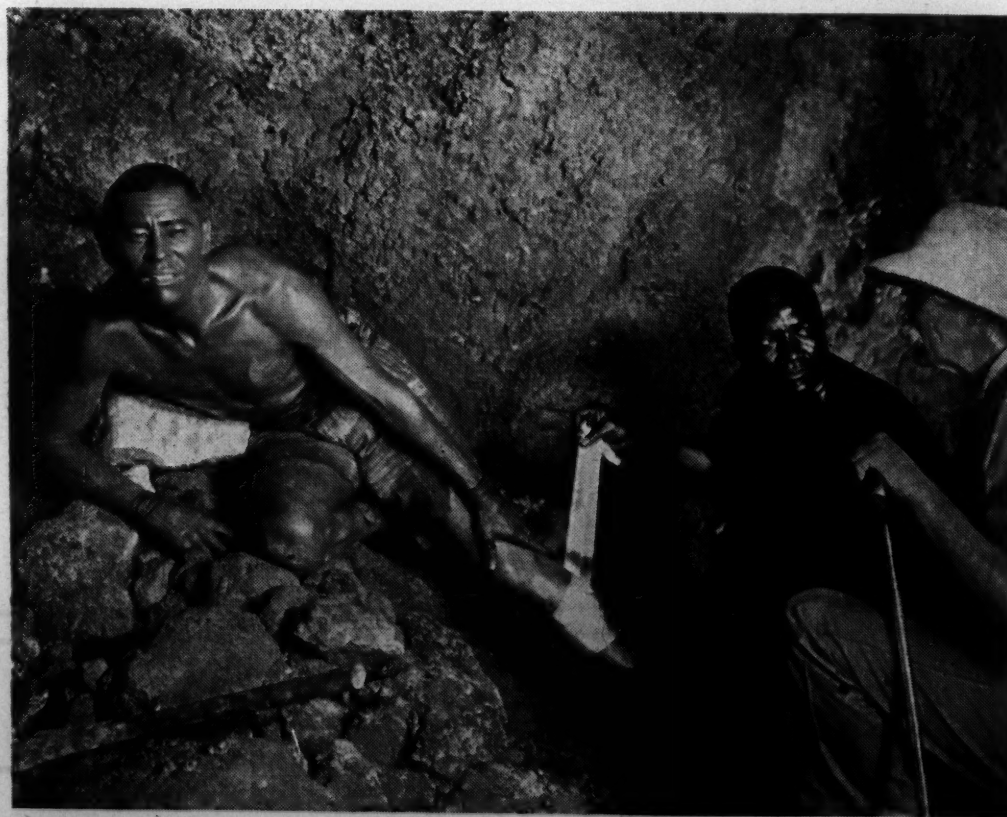
From *West of Zanzibar*—a pot-pourri, including
Lon Chaney.



From *Diamond Handcuffs*, a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer film directed by John P. McCarthy



From *Diamond Handcuffs*, a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer film directed by John P. McCarthy.





From *In Old Kentucky*, a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer film, directed by John M. Stahl. Stepin Fetchit as "High Pockets."





Victoria Spivey, famous "Blues" singer, who plays the role of "Missy" in *Hallelujah*, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's new film, directed by King Vidor.



Nina Mae McKenney, negro dancer, who plays in *Hallelujah*.

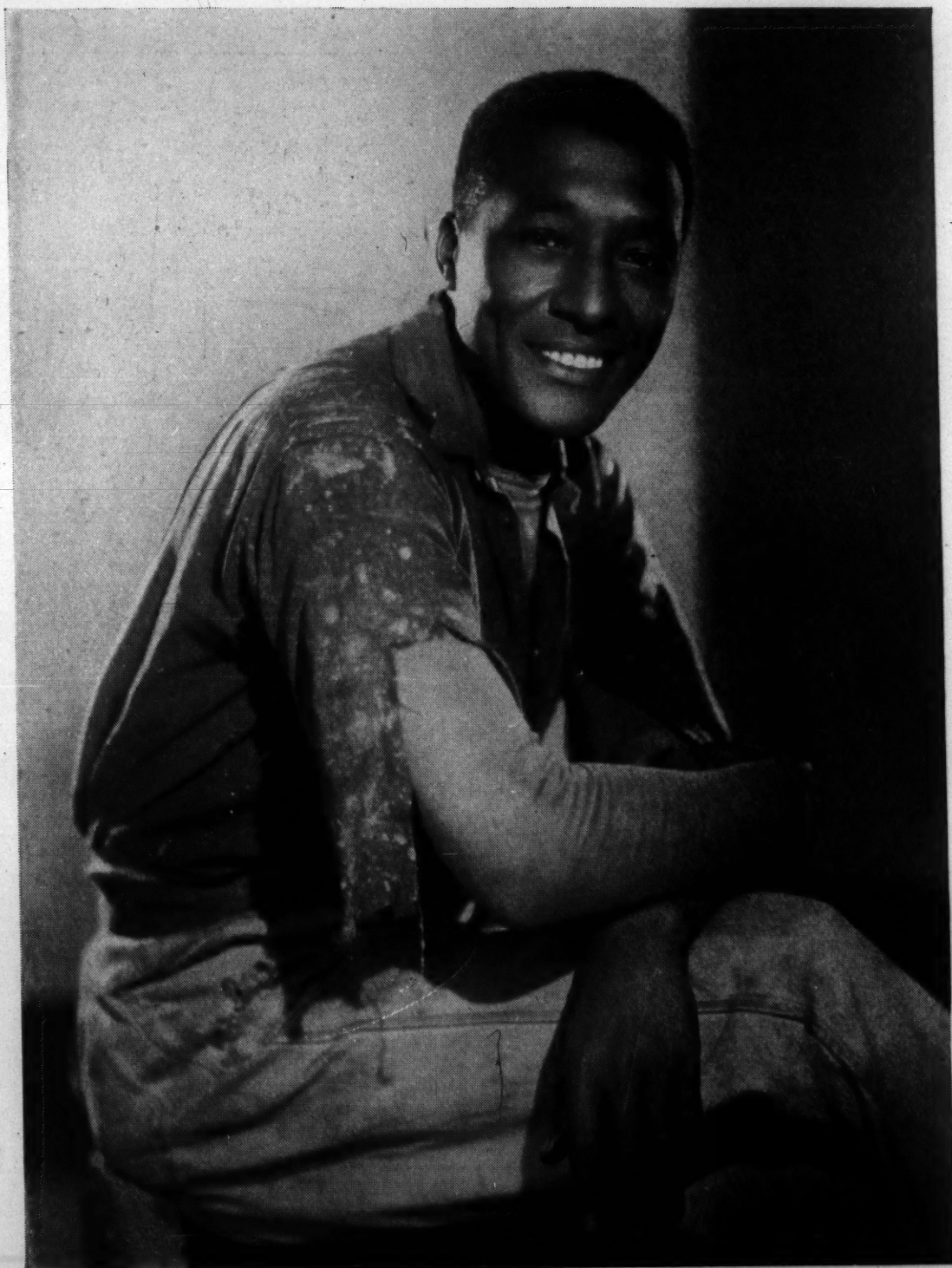
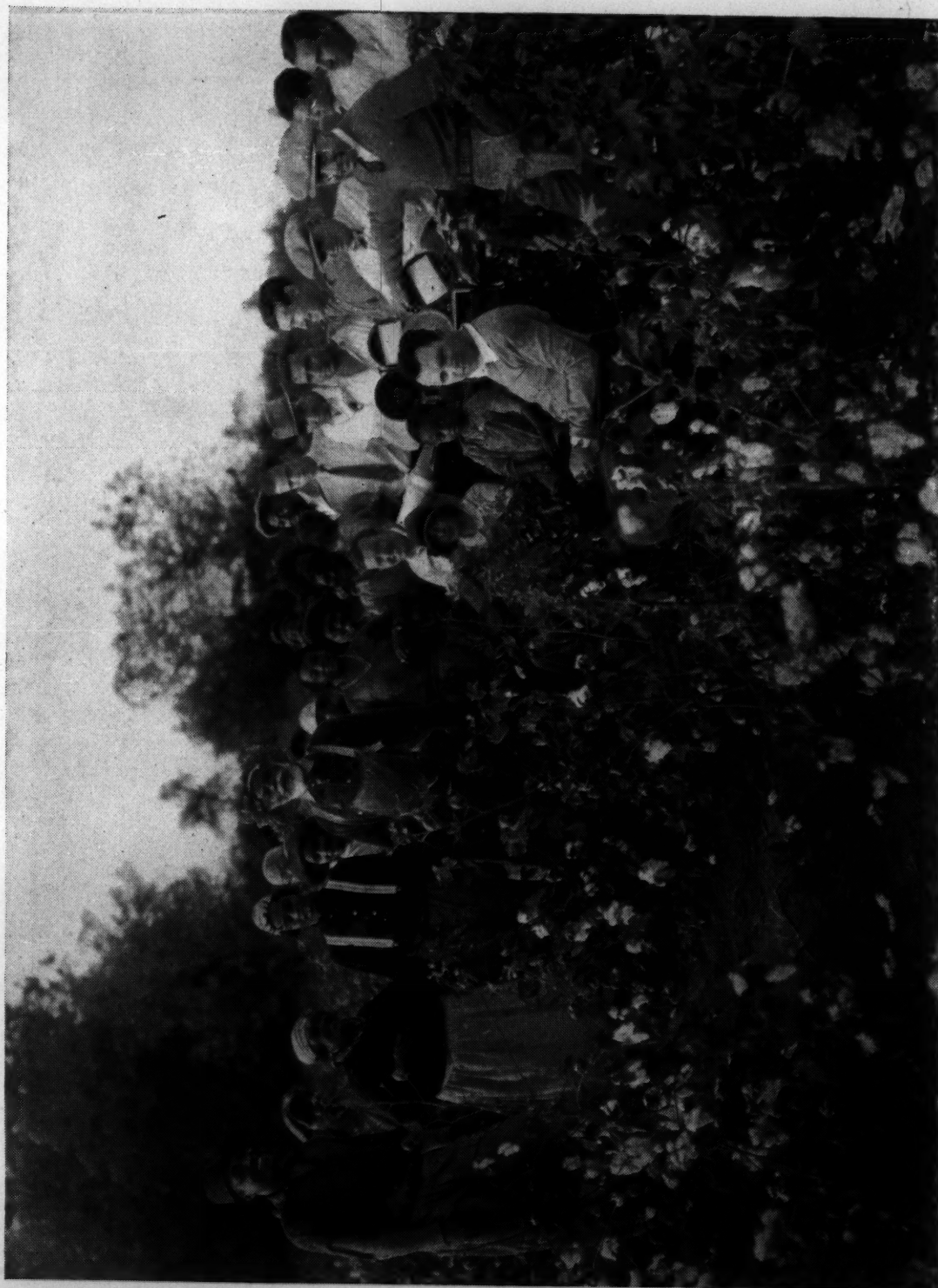


Photo : Ruth Harriet Louise

Daniel Haynes, who plays lead in *Hallelujah*, King Vidor's all-negro film for M. G. M.



King Vidor, directing for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, working on the first all-negro picture made in Hollywood. Locales were chosen in the southern states. Daniel Haynes (*left*) plays lead.

CLOSE UP

white who would not accept a Negro unless as a servant, will be compelled to admit that at least he can be something else; many an indifferent white will be beguiled into a positive attitude of friendliness; many a Negro will have his race-consciousness and self-respect stimulated. In short, the Negro movie actor is a means of getting acquainted with Negroes and under proper direction and sympathetic treatment can easily become a potent factor in our great struggle for better race relations. And the talkie which is being despised in certain artistic circles is giving him the great opportunity to prove his right to a place on the screen.

BLACK SHADOWS

When you read a Negro book, novel or play or poems, when you hear a Negro sing (and Marion Anderson sings at this year's Promenades), you find a new life, very rich, very swift, intense and dynamic; unlike ours, but full of things which we cannot help knowing we lack. When you go to the screen, you see objects like Anita Page, or a bit of French fun about the outskirts of Paris, or a German film in which you are led into a million rooms. You perhaps see a Russian film, and you think here it is again, life an affair to be taken and settled with and made something of. Life very new,

CLOSE UP

and something to be insisted on. You think that perhaps if there were some Negro films, they might have the same range and sweep and drive. Themes that matter are what are wanted, we know, and films made by people who dare to be big. You know that some of the black authors have the scope, and that they almost cannot help having the themes. You wonder, could there be a Negro cinema?

You don't have to wonder why there isn't. Big business makes that clear. And perhaps there couldn't be in America, and France would make it chic and run these films in outhouses in the Rue Blomet with postage-stamp screens, strapontins and long, long intervals. And Germany might have, but Germany is so mixed up with making films to please other countries. It all seems very unlikely, and you go back to America, because they are, after all, beginning to make a few, though in the wrong way, and you come to the conclusion that the only thing may be that in time perhaps, among the romantic mammy pictures, one or two serious black Othello pictures may slip out. It seems that must be the only way that can happen. Quietly, one or two here and there, and not too much fuss about it.

But one wishes one wishes there were young Negroes who could and would get together and make their films, and let us in to see them perhaps, but *make* them anyway, and make them black. One wishes, when one turns over in one's mind the richness laid there by Negro writers and singers, and then one looks at the screen as it is and wonders why all this world finds no place there. All this world whose speed and sensitiveness and saltiness and—ironically—freedom, is locked in the word "black".

CLOSE UP

If you look at the films in which Negroes have figured, you will find a few travel pictures, *Zeliv*, *Voyage au Congo*, *The Black Journey*, *Samba*, and one or two German ones, and the *Voyage au Liberia*, which I just missed at the Vieux Colombier. None of these are as good as they might be, qua films. For the rest, your list will be limited to pictures, some stills of which appear in this issue, in which Negroes play subsidiary parts. A black band playing in the background, or a waiter who may or may not be put in for "atmosphere" or comic relief. There are some talkies. There are no really serious Negro films. *Samba* and *Zeliv* are exceptions. These were not only filmed in native country, but they enact native stories. *Samba*, I have not seen; but *Zeliv* is by no means good, though it cannot help being interesting. As to the jazz side, Josephine Baker acted in a French film, and was surprisingly good. But Josephine Baker is more an invention of Paris than an interpreter of jazz, and this film was one of those affairs in which the French run riot with le décor moderne, and neglected the make-up of the Baker so much that she was hardly recognisable from one scene to the next. So that may be called a typically French film, and not Negro. Then there was another French picture with Catherine Hessling and Johnny Hudgins But there are no really serious Negro films.

And there ought to be. There ought to be because there are Negro novels, and plays and poems. There ought to be because the Negro is marvellously photogenic, and the cinema is equally an affair of blacks and whites. There ought to be because here is a

CLOSE UP

race which has, in short time, expressed itself vitally in literature and a consideration of that literature shows that the qualities which make it so vital are exactly those which films demand.

It is a stock phrase that novels such as *The Walls of Jerico*, *Home to Harlem* (but not *Banjo*), *Fire in the Flint*, *Black Sadie*, and so on, possesses "sense of rhythm". It is an equal cliché that the Negro possesses wonderful "emotional responsiveness", and that he can move beautifully. Well, films are a matter of rhythm, and the way these novels, and *Porgy*, and other plays, develop is rhythmic. It is not so generally recognised that the Negroes have a great sense of imagery. But if you read Hughes intelligently, and are not obsessed by self-created smart fun of the jazz rhythms there, you will see vivid and easy images. He says that a railway arch is a sad song in the air, and I ask you to look at that for a moment. And again. That is what he can do, and others can do things like it. That is what Negroes have to give, and because they have something to give, that is why there should be a black cinema, as well as an approximately white one. If Negroes had nothing more to say than what we ourselves say already, would that be very interesting? It is because colour counts that black films should be made alongside white-ish ones.

Because it is the reason why Negro books and books about Negroes have been so belatedly popular in London this spring (*Scarlet Sister Mary*, *The Magic Island*, *Mamba's Daughters*) that there is a difference of mentality. Something which we have not got, but which we may respond to. We

CLOSE UP

may not fully understand it, but we can in part appreciate it. We certainly can't reproduce it, and that is why there should be Negro films made by and about them. Not black films passing white, and not, please, white passing for black. We want no van Vechtens of the films.

The talkies have meant one thing, at any rate. They have meant the discovery that Negroes have a voice. With great courage, *Hallelujah* was made. I am afraid I don't expect much of *Hallelujah*, but it was an experiment, and other firms are rushing to make coloured talkies. Fox's *Heart's in Dixie* got very good notices, despite being hard to hear, and its dancing was grand. But these all perpetuate the way down South in the land of cotton idea, which really ought to be forgotten. All this Uncle Tom business (though that film, I believe, was the first in which an important Negro actor had an important part). If you want to know what way down South means to a Negro actor, you can read *Fire in the Flint*, and your pillow will be damp, and it won't be the ceiling leaking. Of course, it is something that films with coloured casts are being made, it is an experiment, though it should have been made long before, when Cecil de Mille first had the script of *Porgy*. But the fact that there is a slight movement, and the fact that *Porgy* and *Hearts in Dixie* were shown soon after each other in London, and *Blackbirds* one prays, will follow, makes it a good time to consider and ask what is going to be done. Now that it has been discovered that Negroes have voices, let it be found too that they have something to say.

Not too many Lenox Avenue films. The problems of the educated urban Negro, but not only Harlem joints. What

CLOSE UP

good will that do? A few are all very well, but they give a wrong impression, and there is so *much* else, so much that is at once bigger and the Negro's own property. Not too much race-problem either (though you can read in *The American Mercury* of last April on "learning to be black" and see a script waiting). I mean, if you bear in mind sufficiently that colour counts, you get, when you meet a great work, beyond colour, though colour could only possibly have made it. But you get to humanity and so on. "Just like us, really" is an insult, and who's "us" anyway?

Matters of tragedy, heaven knows there are enough, and matters of history. Has anyone ever thought of filming some Negro hero? No. Because it would be realised that here was a matter of serious expression. Yet take the story of Henri Chrstophe (if only from *Black Majesty*) or take some of the stories in *The Magic Island*. What films there would be! It is shameful to be denied them. And take the pleas which reach the *Times* correspondence column on the subject of our gin exportations to the Gold Coast, and read *West African Secret Societies*. Take these subjects, and you would have epic themes for the cinema, which dies for want of them. Negro history, which so little is known about the story of Phyllis Wheatley and not stories of mammies in coloured handkerchiefs, and not only Harlem jazz films. Serious films. The two sides which we as whites are so little sensible of, the historical and the life of the urban, educated Negro.

And why not a little better and a little more travel films? In Germany, talking about *Samba*, they said to me, "But why do not you, with your Empire, go out and do things

CLOSE UP

like this?" We have gone to the Maoris, but I do not think South Africa or the West Indies have been realised for the life they contain. Not a question of flying around with Cobham, and landing and then showing what a funny way native women do their hair. But send out a well-equipped expedition, with men who know how to film and men who have studied the races they are visiting. Then there would be documents of interest to everybody. Karl Freund is in Albania; maybe Albanians *are* interesting The best film is the perfect documentary, in which the themes and drama of the country under review is brought out and developed with as much care and sensitiveness as any studio work-of-art. These *might* be made by white men; I cannot see the best work in studios coming from white directors working with a coloured cast. I cannot see how they can understand them. If only in time, Negro directors and Negro cameramen could be encouraged into existence

But there is a slight start, Fetchit has come into his own, and if it can be guided, and if we keep our heads in the direction of what we expect, and don't lower them to what we are given, we shall be given something in time worth while.

It is all a question of drama and conflict on the screen, and the screen is hard up for it, whereas the Negro comes into drama and conflict at every turn, it being the heritage the white man never thought he was giving him. And when with this you get responsiveness and grace and rhythm, you see quite suddenly that if the screen doesn't take care, the things it most wants will be put into other mediums more open to Negroes, where their presence will cause people to

CLOSE UP

say, "there's all this, why don't we get it on the screen", and *why* don't we?.

We all know why, but the obstacles can't be permanent and insuperable, and surely, surely, we are all old enough to insist on our right to beauty, which is meaning, wherever we can find it? And we don't get it by blacking our faces and wearing white gloves, and I don't think we get it from real Negroes having to live down to the pleasant banjo-strumming, cotton-field singing idea we have of them. We want the real thing, always, and the cinema demands the real thing, and heaven knows there is enough reality waiting there, if black shadows might move on our screens in their own patterns, and have their own screens, too, to do it on. And not rely on white patronage to do it with. For surely they are as tired of all that as of white, yellow, white—nothing but white—films; and heaven knows I am.

ROBERT HERRING.

CLOSE UP

A LETTER FROM WALTER WHITE

(Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, author of *The Fire in the Flint* and *Flight*, both novels of negro life, as well as much research work in negro social problems.)

As a result of the successful use of Negro themes in the American theatre and the acclaim which has come to Negro artists in the theatre, on the concert platform and through the work of Negro novelists and poets, there is now beginning to be seen a considerable activity in the world of the cinema with Negro life as the material used. Four of the biggest cinema producing companies in the United States are at present at work on Negro pictures. One of them, "*Hearts in Dixie*", produced by William Fox is to have its world première to-night.

From what I have heard of all of these pictures now being made none of them reaches a very high level either of interpretation of Negro life or honest presentation of genuine Negro material. All four of them are of the minstrel show, "Befo' de war", type. That, however, does not seem to me important. With the vast amount of race prejudice in America and particularly because the producers of moving pictures must depend upon a nation-wide distribution which includes the South, it is almost imposible to start off with

CLOSE UP

the presentation of anything but the old stereotyped concepts of the Negro.

Perhaps in time we may evolve to the point where moving picture producers and distributors may have intelligence and courage enough to utilize the excellent material contained in some of the more notable novels written about the Negro by Negro and white writers during the last few years.

Frankly, I am not hopeful of this for some years to come. Perhaps the only way such a picture could be done probably would be through its production by a European company and then brought to America with the accolade of a European success precisely as Krenek's "Jonny Spielt Auf" recently gained some attention and success in the world of opera.

If you care to do so you might run this letter as a short, hasty and, I fear, far too inadequate picture of the possibilities of the use of Negro material in the cinema.

WALTER WHITE.

A LETTER FROM PAUL GREEN

I am very much interested in your proposed number of *Close Up*; to be devoted to Negro art for the cinema.

There is a great field for exploration here and especially,

CLOSE UP

now that the phonofilm is an actuality, will the richness of Negro life—mime, song, dance and picturesque background—have a full chance to be exposed to the world, the white man's world as well as the Negro's. It will, of course, be some time in coming to fulfilment, but sooner or later it will be, and I for one welcome such signs as this given by your magazine. You say in your letter that your number will be devoted mainly to Negro writers and their views on the subject, accompanied by "stills", etc. Such a number ought to be of tremendous interest. As a white man who has done some writing on Negro subjects, I wish to congratulate you on this move. I shall look forward to seeing the number.

PAUL GREEN.

(Mr. Green is the author of *In Abraham's Bosom*, and other Negro plays).

THE AFRAMERICAN CINEMA

The negro is not new to the American film. The late Bert Williams appeared in a film before the war. But this did antagonism. It was the film of the Johnson-Jeffries fight not get very considerable circulation due to Southern that thrust the negro out of films and created the interstate commerce edict against fight films. Sigmund Lubin produced all-negro comedies in Philadelphia before the war.

CLOSE UP

The negroes themselves have been producing pictures on the New Jersey lots, deserted by the white firms that migrated to California. These companies have starred actors like Paul Robeson and Charles Gilpin in white melodramas like *Ten Nights in a Barroom*. White impersonations of negroes have been very frequent, either in farces or in the perennial *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Negro children have in the last years been appearing in such slapstick films as Hal Roach perpetrates with his tedious and unconvincing Gang. The treatment of Farina is typical of the theatrical (variety and film) acceptation of the negro as clown, clodhopper or scarecrow, an acceptation which is also social. No objections have been raised by the solid South to Farina's mistreatment by the white children (to me a constantly offensive falsehood and unpardonable treachery of the director), nor to Tom Wilson's nigger-clowning.

The present vogue for negro films was inevitable. The film trails behind literature and stage for subject-matter. There has been a negro vogue since the spirituals were given their just place in popular attention. Many negro mediocrities have ridden to glory on this fad. Many white dabblers have attained fame by its exploitation. The new negro was suddenly born with it. Cullen and Hughes were crowned poets, but Jean Toomer, a great artist among the negroes, has not yet been publicly acclaimed. He first appeared before the hullabaloo was begun. The theatre took the negro up. First Gilpin and eventually came *Porgy*. Now the film. Sound has made the negro the "big thing" of the film-moment.

Of course, the first negro film in the revival had to be

CLOSE UP

Uncle Tom's Cabin. I praise in it the gaiety of the first part and the friendly, unsupercilious treatment of the negro and the general goodwill of the actors. I condemn in it the perpetuation of the clap-trap sentimentality. This is not the day to take Harriet Beecher Stowe too seriously. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* should have been produced as folk-composition, or better not at all. It is not important as matter or film. Sound is bringing the negro in with a sort of Eastman Johnson-Stephen Foster-Kentucky Jubilee genre, or with the Octavus Roy Cohen-Hugh Wiley crowd satisfiers, where the negro is still the nigger-clown, shrewd sometimes and butt always. And Vidor's *Hallelujah* with a good-looking yaller girl. As for me, I shall be assured of the white man's sincerity when he gives me a blue nigger. I want one as rich as the negroes in Poirier's documents of Africa. I am not interested primarily in verbal humor, in clowning nor in sociology. I want cinema and I want cinema at its source. To be at its source, cinema must get at the source of its content. The negro is plastically interesting when he is most negroid. In the films he will be plastically interesting only when the makers of the films know thoroughly the treatment of the negro structure in the African plastic, when they know of the treatment of his movements in the ritual dances, like the dance of the circumcision, the Ganza. In Ingram's *The Garden of Allah* the only good moment was the facial dance of the negro performer.

The cinema, through its workers, has been content to remain ignorant. It might have saved itself a great deal of trouble and many failures and much time had he studied the experience of the other arts. Well, what can the negro

CLOSE UP

cinema learn from *The White Man's Negro* and *The Black Man's Negro* in art, in literature, in theatre?

Graphic art: The Greek and Roman sculptors of black boys were defeated because they did not study the structure of the faces. In modern art, there is Georg Kolbe's fine *Kneeling Negro*. There are Annette Rosenshine's heads of Robeson and Florence Mills—elastic, lusty miniatures. And there is the vapid, external, gilded negro by Jesper in the Musée du Congo, Tervueren, Belgium. Compare. If you want to see how a principle can be transferred and reconverted, see what the late Raymond Duchamp-Villon learned from African sculpture. Relaxation among angles. Study Modigliani for transference to another medium. In painting examine Jules Pascin's painting of a mulatto girl and Pierre Bonnard's more stolid negro. But always the source: the sculpture of the Congo, the Ivory Coast, the Gold Coast, the bronzes of Benin, the friezes of Dahomey. Observe their relation to the actual African body, coiffure, etc., to the dance. What do you deduce?

Literature: In America I know of but one white man's novel that has recognized the negro as a human-esthetic problem—which he must be to the artist—and not either a bald bit of sociology or something to display. I refer to Waldo Frank's *Holiday*. This eloquent though monotoned book is not a bare or ornamental statement of the inter-race. Its concern is not with the culmination of the tragedy in the lynching, but with the relationships involved. The horror and the sacrifice of the lynching are certainly unavoidable, but greater and above these are the relationships, and the denial of the beauty of these relationships by the final mob

CLOSE UP

act. This is the one book I know of that has recognized the entirety as ultimately human relationship, which determines the aesthetic unity. There is not in this book the ethnographical-archaeological-sociological preoccupation that obscures the major motif in the other books. This is a novel, it is art, it is distillation, condensation, purity. Shands, Stribling, Peterkin, Van Vechten all strive to reveal their intimacy with the details of life and vocabulary of the strange folk they present. Shand's *Black and White* and Stribling's *Birthright* do free the central motif from a number of these interferences, leaving a clearer path to the culmination. But the motif should determine the book, which it does not in either case. Peterkin wishes to be genuine (but to be genuine is not to be unselective) and sympathetic and impartial. This makes her work a less questionable enterprise than Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven*, the conscience of which must be severely doubted. *Black April* is better than *Green Thursday*. The former obscures the relevant data with data on folk-idiosyncracies. It is the artist's business to evaluate the relevant data that he may be better able to know its potentialities, and not to record every detail contributing to the formation of that material. *Green Thursday* indicated no sense of the potential materials, their convertibility and relevant form. They were dark waters poured into Hamlin Garland jugs or Mary Wilkins-Freeman ewers, taking the form and conveyance of the receptacles.

Theatre: The film may find instructive analogies and sources in three plays: *Earth* by Em Jo Basshe, *Porgy* by the Heywards and *The Emperor Jones* by Eugene O'Neill.

CLOSE UP

Earth is an instance of a play with a concept in its theme, but no recognition of that concept perceptible in the language or human-arrangement of the play. The theme was meant to articulate the struggle with the negro between paganism and Christianity. Instead it is a struggle of personalities we witness. The theme indicates what the negro film promises in the way of experience, when the philosophic cinematist will be present. *Porgy* is more immediate indication. It lacks all concept. It lacks significant intention. It lacks a valuable narrative. Its tale is that of Culbertson's *Goat Alley* and the old white melodrama—the wicked man, the lured girl, happy dust, the cripple, sacrifice, vengeance. But its virtue is folk, always a good source. It has caught the folk in its rhythm and whatever idea the play possesses is in this rhythm. This “rhythm as idea” makes of it a better play than Torrence's *Granny Maumee*, in spite of the latter's effort to convince us of folk authenticity. The tragedy of *Porgy* is no more important than the tragedy of *Goat Alley*. It is rendered more poignant simply because it has taken place in a folk-structure to whose rhythm the individual participants contribute. That is why the character of the crab-vendor, suggested by one of the actors and inserted into the completed play, does not obtrude. It is of the total folk-structure and easily finds its place in it. In the Theatre Guild production the play failed as a rhythmic unit, leaving us to enjoy, not the entity, but the details. This may be due somewhat to breaks in the authors' construction. The authors and the director failed to sustain the rhythmic counterplay between Crown's sacrilege and the Negroes' religion in the hurricane

CLOSE UP

scene. This was a play meant to be produced not mimetically but choreographically, and moreover—as folk—to be stylized. It laid too much stress on a bad story, the songs were not intervalled with precision, and—most serious of faults—the diction was stereotype. This last, of course, has nothing to do with the production, it is the authors' weakness. The authors confess they did not take advantage of the original Gullah dialect because it would be incomprehensible to an audience not familiar with it. Should Synge have avoided the Gaelic on the same score? Synge exploited, and converted the difficult speech, suiting it to the language of his audience, which was his language-medium, and attained thereby a tremendous eloquence. Any author, intuitively gifted and philologically and rhythmically aware, could go to the documents and records of a Gonzales, a Bennett or a Reed Smith and re-create a diction at once original, relevant, convincing—and comprehensible. Yet Peterkin and the Heywards, operating in the very environment of the dialect, could do nothing with it but run away from it. These immediately foregoing words are full of meaning to the negro film with speech.

Coming to the negro talkie, we can find no more complete entrance than by way of *The Emperor Jones*. In itself *The Emperor Jones* is not particularly negro. One may question the thesis of atavism which runs through it, as one may easily deny the too patent psychology. But it is excellent theatre, a theatre of concurrent and joining devices. It is, in fact, better cinema than theatre, for its movement is uninterrupted. the uninterrupted movement can be borne only by the film and screen, for the necessity of changing the sets obliges an

interruption in the theatre. There is a central motive of the escaping Jones. The theatre has not the capabilities to reveal the textural effects necessary to the drama, such as the increasing sheen of sweat on the bare body. Here is your "photogenic" opportunity! The theatre can never equal the cinema in the effect of the gradual oncoming dark, also a dramatic progression in the play. The ominous and frightful shadows, the spectres of the boy shot at craps, the phantom galley—the cinema has long been well-prepared for these. And now the sounds. The play is dependant on the concurrences and reinforcements of sounds. The sounds are part of the drama. The drumbeats, the bullet-shots, the clatter of the dice, the moan of the slaves, and the recurring voice of Jones, his prayer—what a composition these offer for a sound-sight-speech film! This is the ideal scenario for the film of sound and speech. Here silence enters as a part of the speech-sound pattern, and becomes more important than ever it was in the silent film! Here one can construct counterpoint and coincidence, for there is here paralleling of sound and sight and their alternation. There is intervaling, a most important detail in the synchronized structure. But all this does not end *The Emperor Jones*. It must be negro! How? We can switch back to my earlier words: "The negro is plastically interesting when he is most negroid" The negroes must be selected for their plastic, negroid structures. Jones should not be mulatto or napoleonic, however psychologic requirements demand it. He should be black so that the sweat may glisten the more and the skin be apprehended more keenly. He should be woolly, tall, broad-nosed and deep-voiced. The moaning

CLOSE UP

should be drawn from a source in the vocal experience of the negro, the medicine doctor's dance from a source in the choreographic experience. But beware! We do not want ethnography, this is no document. I am not asking for the insertions of *Storm over Asia*; I am asking for a tightly interwoven pattern. The sources are only sources. Folk, race are not complete in themselves. Dialect is not an aesthetic end. I am not asking for the duplications such as Langston Hughes writes. We shall have enough of these and they will be nothing but records, and records lacking even intelligent selection and commentary. What I have said in my remarks upon the negro in art and literature will indicate what the ideal negro-film must not be and must be. The documentary film is ethnographic. The documentary film is a source, but even in a document one cannot place everything and there must be concessions to the form. In the constructed film of the negro, the art-film let us say, the problem will always be, not the negro in society, but the negro in the film. The problem will not be that of Edward Sheldon's *The Nigger*, filmed years ago with William Farnum (Fox Film *The Governor*). That sort of play in reality omits the negro, just as *A Doll's House* actually gave us no woman but a thesis. We are, I hope, far away now from films about "the black peril"—although *The Birth of a Nation* is still with us and "the yellow peril" is a constant offering. The problem of intermarriage and inter-race is not likely to be honestly dealt with on the American screen for a long time, but I do not complain of that—the problem play has generally been dull drama, it would be even duller cinema. When the cinematists have shown that they have

CLOSE UP

intelligently examined the negro as subject-matter, that they know a great deal about him and his experiences, then the problem film of the negro can be attempted, for the problem will be comprised then, and only then, in a complete experience of a people. It is indeed reassuring that literature in dealing with the negro has become more sympathetic. The sympathy, however, has not extended as yet to the formal material, the convertible raw stuff—it is humanitarian, and that is good. But in the humanitarian sentiment one still detects considerable patronage, indulgence, condescension and an attitude hardly judicious, that of the examiner of an oddity. In the documentary films of Burbidge and the Cobham journey, the captions are frequently supercilious, and in a document of a polar trip, a bit of non-documentation is perpetrated for humor: a negro hand runs off scared upon seeing a polar-bear, safely bound, hauled upon the deck. These caucasian evidences will persist a long time and wherever they will persist, there will be no proper attitude towards the negro as subject-matter.

Then is the hope in negro films turned by negroes? That would be a hope, if the American negro had given evidence of caring for and understanding his own experience sufficiently to create works of art in the other mediums. But the American negro as graphic artist has shown very little awareness of this experience; as writer he is imitative, respectable, blunt, ulterior and when he pretends to follow negro materials, he does little more than duplicate them. Of course there are exceptions. The exceptions, I believe, will eventually create the rule. But that rule will be created

CLOSE UP

only by artists who are strong enough to resist the vogue which would inflate them. We are now entering into a vogue of the negro film. Perhaps when that is over, the true, profound, realized negro film will be produced, and perhaps negroes will produce them.

It will have been observed that my preoccupation has been constantly with relationships. I have been preoccupied with relationships only because they are constantly present. The relationship between the African dances and the sophisticated Charleston and *The Black Bottom* is unavoidable, the relationship between native negro song and jazz is evident. We are always what we were: that is perhaps a platitude but it is also an important truth for the negro film. It suggests a synthetic film, a composite film, in which the audience's experience of a girl by Tanganyika becomes the audience's experience of an idolized Josephine Baker. Folk, race dominates the world. There is a theme. And the movie with its devices for simultaneous and composite filming offers the opportunity. Someone might similarly make an incisive film deriving the hooded Ku Klux Klan from the leopard-skin-hooded vendetta of the black Aniotas of Africa. In that way lies penitence for *The Clansman* which became *The Birth of a Nation*.

HARRY A. POTAMKIN.

OF NEGRO MOTION PICTURES

The traditions of the American stage became the aphorisms of the American screen in so far as the Negro was concerned. With the single exception of David Wark Griffith's colossal spectacle—*The Birth of a Nation*—Negroes until very recent times were used on the screen only to provide atmosphere as servants or savages or both according to the requirements of the locale. As a spectacle Griffith's production was awe-inspiring and stupendous; but as a picture of Negro life it was not only false but has done the Negro irreparable harm. And no wonder, since it was taken from a puerile novel, *The Clansman*, a book written to arouse racial hate by appealing to the basest passions of the semi-literate.

The success of *Porgy* and *Blackbirds** probably was the stimulus which hurried Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and Fox into the production of all Negro pictures. I would like to think that the masters of Hollywood have suddenly come to the realization of the wealth of drama in Negro life, but this appears too good to be true. Surely, *Hearts in Dixie*, a talking picture recently released by Fox, justifies no such

* Which just completed a year's unbroken performance on Broadway.

CLOSE UP

high hopes. Even aside from the crudities which appear to be inherent in all of the so-called talkies, there is no real sustained story—only a series of more or less related incidents. However, there is one redeeming feature—the rich resonance of the Negro voices in speech and in song prove that in the field of the “talkie” they cannot be surpassed. Of *Hearts in Dixie*, Robert C. Benchley, dramatic critic of the *New Yorker*, and former dramatic critic of *Life* magazine, writes in *Opportunity*—a journal of Negro Life—for April: “It may be that the talking-movies must be participated in wholly by Negroes, but, if so, then so be it. In the Negro the sound picture has found its ideal protagonist.”

Traditional racial attitudes in America have proven a tremendous obstacle in the way of those whose creative instincts lead them to see the beauty and pathos in Negro life. Motion picture producers will hesitate long before they attempt anything in the nature of a new evaluation of the Negro. America is conservative to the point of reaction when it comes to ideas—especially ideas on the so-called race problem. Therefore, it is probable that the screen will follow in the paths of least resistance, for on that path the box office lies.

It would appear that the history of the Negro in America might provide a rich source of dramatic material for treatment on the screen. Surely, of all the racial groups which make up this roaring democracy, none have sustained such an unremitting and colorful conflict with the forces of their environment as the Negro. From the time the first slave

CLOSE UP

ship anchored off the coast of Virginia in 1619 until the present hour, the Aframerican, as he has been facetiously designated, has been the most persistent insoluble in the chemistry of Americanization. As a result, around him have whirled the mightiest forces of American life. He has been the cause of bitter strife—the genesis of devastating conflicts—the source of endless speculation and perplexity—and the origin of much of the humor which is labelled American.

In the exploitation of Negro material the screen has lagged behind the stage—and the stage has been inexcusably tardy. For fifty years almost the stage adhered to the Uncle Tom tradition. When the Negro was dramatized, invariably he was a simple, old retainer of the Uncle Tom type with white, woolly hair and a quavering voice, extolling the virtues of Missus and Massa; or he was an ignorant, improvident scamp of the Topsy genre, although this was sometimes varied by the use of a black villain in order to provide a suitable object for the exaltation of Nordic supremacy. Even these characterizations were seldom, if ever, interpreted by actual Negroes. White men in black face, after the fashion of the once popular minstrel, were selected to depict Negroes. And as a rule they were just about as accurate in their portrayal as they were real in their racial delineation. The use of Negro themes interpreted by *de facto* Negroes is comparatively new to the American stage. It followed in the wake of the remarkable performance of Charles S. Gilpin as Emperor Jones in Eugene O'Neill's play of that name. That Negro themes are capable of successful and stirring dramatic treatment, and that Negro

CLOSE UP

casts can intelligently and sometimes brilliantly interpret these themes can now be attested by the success of Paul Green's *In Abraham's Bosom* and DuBose Heyward's *Porgy*. And the number of plays*, dealing with various phases of Negro life which were produced in New York this season, indicate increasing popularity of the Negro play and the Negro actor.

Hallelujah, directed by King Vidor, and not yet released, may prove a surprise. It may be to the motion pictures with sound accompaniment what *Porgy* has been to the American stage. Vidor will have everything—robust and resonant voices—the panoramic sweep of great plantations, white with cotton—a carefully trained and directed cast—everything. He will only need a story. Will he sweep aside outworn traditions and get it? “Aye, there’s the rub.”

This does not imply that there will be no Negro films. On the contrary, the “talkies” present a magnificent chance for the development of short comedy reels wherein the happy vagaries of Negro life can be depicted with incidental singing and dancing and the fun making propensities of Negro characters portrayed with profit if not with accuracy. But only a motion picture impresario endowed with exceptional courage will attempt to film a great epic of the Negro in America—or will dare to find in the heroic struggle of this unfortunate people the universal human attributes of mankind. And unless he finds these things—easy for the unprejudiced eye to see—he will never

* *Goin' Home*. *Black Boy*.

CLOSE UP

attain that height of artistry, the basis of which has been and must always be truth.

ELMER ANDERSON CARTER,

EDITOR,

OPPORTUNITY MAGAZINE,

A JOURNAL OF NEGRO LIFE.

Address: 17, Madison Avenue—10th floor,
New York City.

BLACK FANFARE

Lying in de jail-house,
Peeping th'ough de bars,
De cold rain a-falling,
And—de—

I don't care how you orchestrate it, on a hundred *boxes* or a hundred silver trumpets, I want a fanfare to welcome the negro film.

I want more than negro actors in negro films, I want more than the negro's vision of the negro; I want the negro exhibitor who will give us the negro reaction to passionless whites through selection of current releases, I want the negro critic.

CLOSE UP

Judgment's a-coming, Judgment's a-coming,
De dark's guine kiver from sho' to sho':
And de angel wid de trumpet say times no mo'.

For *judgment* substitute *awakening*.

No longer a colour but a people! Art directors worked on the principal of "black women and blue wine"; greased glintings of majestic torso; black faces and white pearls and red lips. Kaleidoscope turned gently to guard against the spontaneous, to ensure the colour pattern. Till in Yvette Cavalcanti tore off the black skin like a cloak, and gave it to the Hessling to wear.

Hallelujah, hallelujah! Kingdom and Race. Hallelujah! The tremendous fact of starting all over again, with no ghastly traditions.

How come dis? Film journals are not the place for enthusiasm and *uppitiness*; beyond that, enthusiasm is dangerous for critical balance. In the first stage to excuse bad acting, the conviction that the film is worth while being cherished before it is unwound, it is hailed as quaint custom. When the critic sees his first batch of negro films he is sure to slip up, just as he did with the early Russian productions. Never mind all negro creative work, in dance or in stone, stands security for LIFE in the negro film.

Mr. Robert Herring in a brilliant article, published in one of the most important English newspapers, pleaded with film producers to find their material in every walk of life. He said, "It is impossible to read in the paper that 'two hundred workmen have been rendered idle as the result of the closing down of the Cum Duffryn Colliery, Port Talbot,

CLOSE UP

without seeing that there is drama behind it." But then the cinema in America and England is dominated by—dare I use the wretched word?—the "bourgeois." Russia had to give us the drama of the workman's life; men like Eisenstien and Dziga-Vertoff who class themselves as workman, and sympathize and feel with workmen. Tell the average American producer that he is a workman and he will not be pleased; he is manufacturing for a middle class market and is graduating himself from the worker's class, a would-be bourgeois! He looks round at the new world, at his neighbour catching the eight-fifteen train, at the thousands following dictates of good citizenship; he is impressed by respectability, but the instincts of the showman tell him that it is not entertainment. On the other hand the negro lives richly, even his prayer meetings become as intoxicating as a dervish dance. Julia Peterkin's *Scarlet Sister Mary* depicts the passions and tranquilities, the robust plays of Paul Green are filled with the blaze of emotion, the moments of semi-madness. Negroes need simply to live on the screen, while you cannot re-live morning bacon and eggs unless in the vein of satire which Jacques Feyder displayed in *Thou Shalt Not*. The point is that Feyder did not pillory himself, that the bourgeois *fay* cannot mock himself, but that every negro can be himself; that there is only one Feyder in a thousand (the genius who is not bound by laws and inhibitions), but that there are plenty of negroes.

Apart from the intense interest of the one and the utter boredom of the other, there is theoretical proof of the superiority of life to the artificial as screen material. Time

CLOSE UP

values of life are always progressive; we change from minute to minute, our circumstances change, the same things may happen to us again but they must have a new significance. Without time values incidents make bad cinema . . . Ivan Moskvin in *The Postmaster* is hurled into the street again and again; the doors fly open once more to spill out unfortunate Ivan, yet nothing new is being impressed in time, there is no mental building up. Second, third and fourth precipitations are meaningless however pretty the composition in space. (the snow falls). Having harrowed us with the sight of Ivan collapsing on the pavement after the violence of ejection (the snow keeps on falling) the director believes that he has merely to repeat the circumstances, without development or elaboration, to create the emotion.

In constructing a story time values are nearly always forgotten or ruined, in transcribing life there is no chance of falsifying these values. Of course the scenarist may reserve the right of selection, although he is forbidden construction; he may mass situations but not impose them . . . First game therefore to the negro film!

For the benefit of the sceptical, who will point out that I have chosen to illustrate my point with an antiquated and obscure picture, I will quote a typical bourgeois super. Does any reader remember the care that Frank Borzage took in *Seventh Heaven* to establish the seven flights of steps? The camera followed Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell from the entrance hall right up the stairs to their attic (I believe that the camera was stationary, the set rising on a lift; half way

CLOSE UP

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CLOSE UP

between each storey the camera would have to mix. This would require careful matching, but would not be as difficult as it sounds). The path of romance leading up from the gutter to the stars! Notice, dear reader, the "bourgeois way"! The spectator had plenty of time to study the steps, he could not very well forget them, he saw that they led from landing to landing, he may have counted them to pass the time . . . Chico dies. Diane imagines her dreams false, and so her love false. Never in this type of picture. Here is Chico pushing his way through the crowd, while the hands of the clock press on to the sacred eleventh hour. "Diane, Diane!" Long shot down the stairs. *How come?* This is a spiral staircase! Collapse of the dramatic moment!

The mind, functioning in space, accepts the shot down the spiral stairs on account of its striking, if hardly original, composition; but the mind, functioning in time, rejects it as preposterous. And this is what they do in a super!

It is depressing to dwell on these old-fashioned pictures; think of every second super and recall the happy endings which give distorted retrospection. A film must be a unity, it must be judged by what you think of it at the end; and the enormous kissing close-up, for the fade-out, contrives neatly to shatter time values.

Glancing back I am appalled to notice that I started with spirituals and finished with *Seventh Heaven*; there must be a moral somewhere.

Hearse done carried somebody to de graveyard,
Hammer keep a-ringing on somebody's coffin.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

CLOSE UP

LONDON AND THE NEGRO FILM

While Wardour Street has been warring with Fleet Street as to the originator of the unusual film movement the London Polytechnic has unaffectedly been creating a metier entirely its own. It has established a reputational rather than a repertory cinema that gives us, as if by the workings of a consistent policy, the life of the humanities that dwell on the outer edges of modern imperialisms.

Sometimes the fare has been straight travel stuff like "South" and the African missionary film they showed early last year. At others a more or less slender thread of narrative has woven the plain 'interest' and 'occupational' stuff into a dramatic unity. This was done with "Nionga" (which the Poly gave us about two years ago), with "Chang" and with "Zeliv". But no matter in what form the film presented has been made, it has always held a subtlety of charm which reveals an intelligence behind the choice of subjects by the Polytechnic's officers that deserves our thanks as well as our congratulations. If it has been straight travel, it has been straight travel with the something else, the something different which separates it from others of its ilk. The camera seems not only to have picked the salient architectures or the picturesque views but has clothed them in a delicate

fabric of humanity, the humanity which after all is essential to, is part of and go with them, but nevertheless is only too often left out.

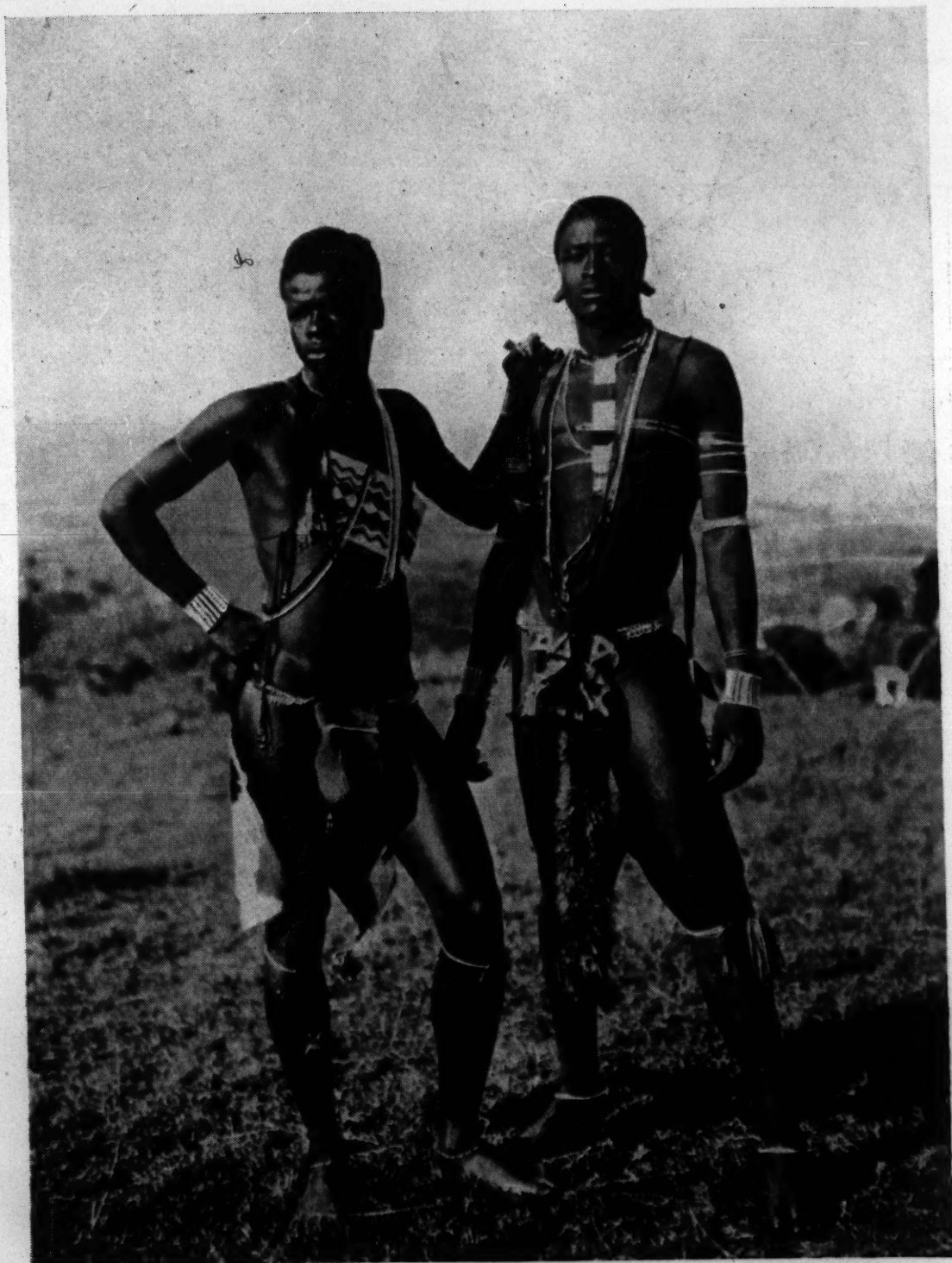
If the film has been of the kind through which a thread of drama runs it is true that absolute naturalism suffers slightly as a consequence, but as in "Chang" and particularly in "Nionga" the dramatic moulding was never obtrusive enough to parody the natives' psychology and rob us of their naïvete and simple charm which has always drawn us to these films as a relief from the sexual saturation of the white man's drama.

A point of paramount importance to the moment is that the Poly has been making box-office successes of these films to the extent of record runs. Besides being several times recalled, "Chang" at one of these periods ran nineteen consecutive weeks. This is proof to the world that in London alone exists a large white public interested in the life of his coloured brethren.

It is not without a tinge of sorrow, one feels that in staking another chip on pre-releasing European's "Under the Southern Cross" the Poly has, save for pictorial and photographic beauty, missed its metier.

The film is based on a Maori legend telling of the endeavours and their consequences, to unite the warring tribes of the Ariki and the Waitai into a single powerful unit, the mise-en-scene being the grand and exquisite environs of the volcano Rua-Taniwha.

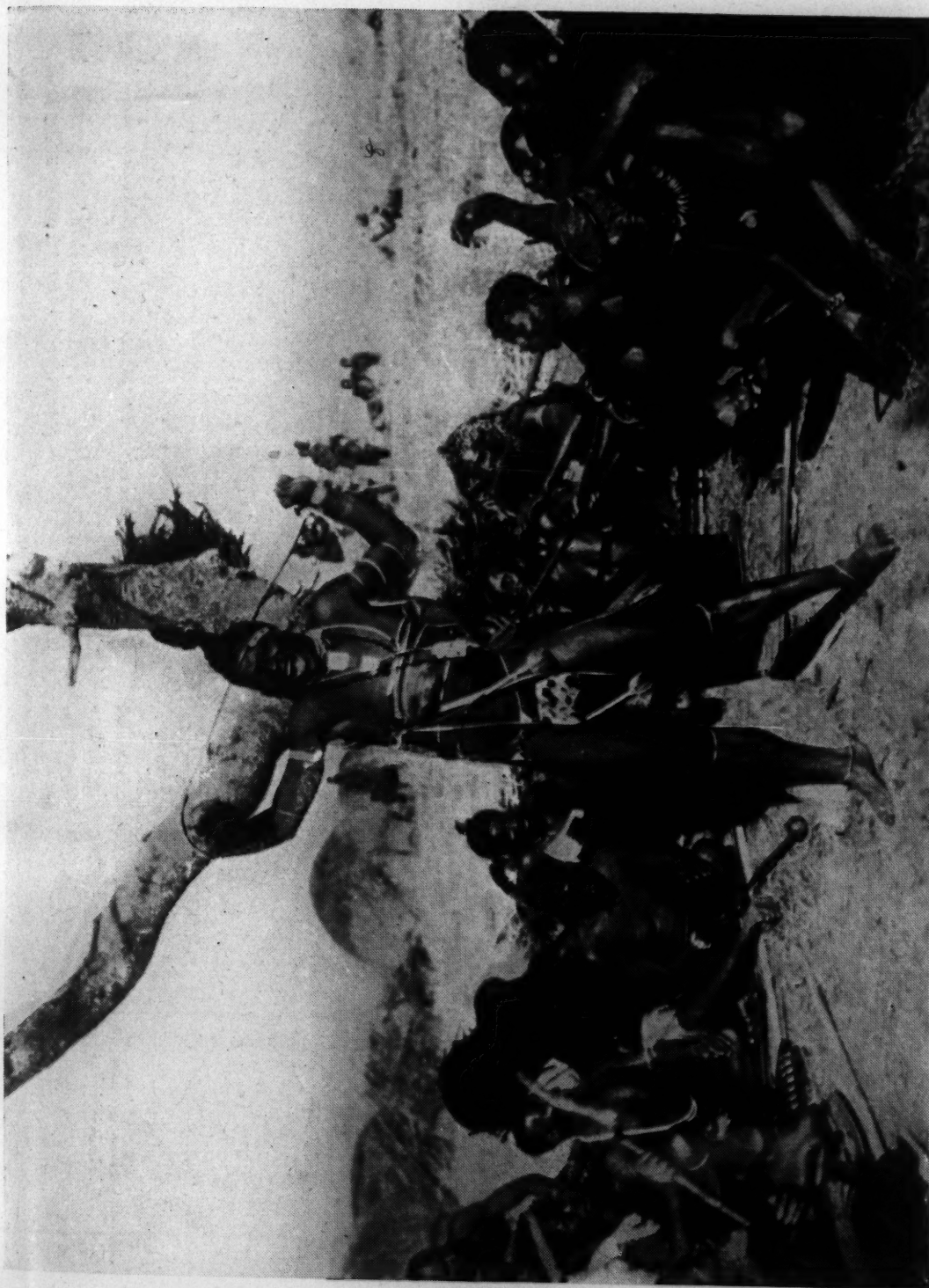
As the Maori is not a negro in the strictest sense, his presence in the May issue, perhaps, demands an apology.



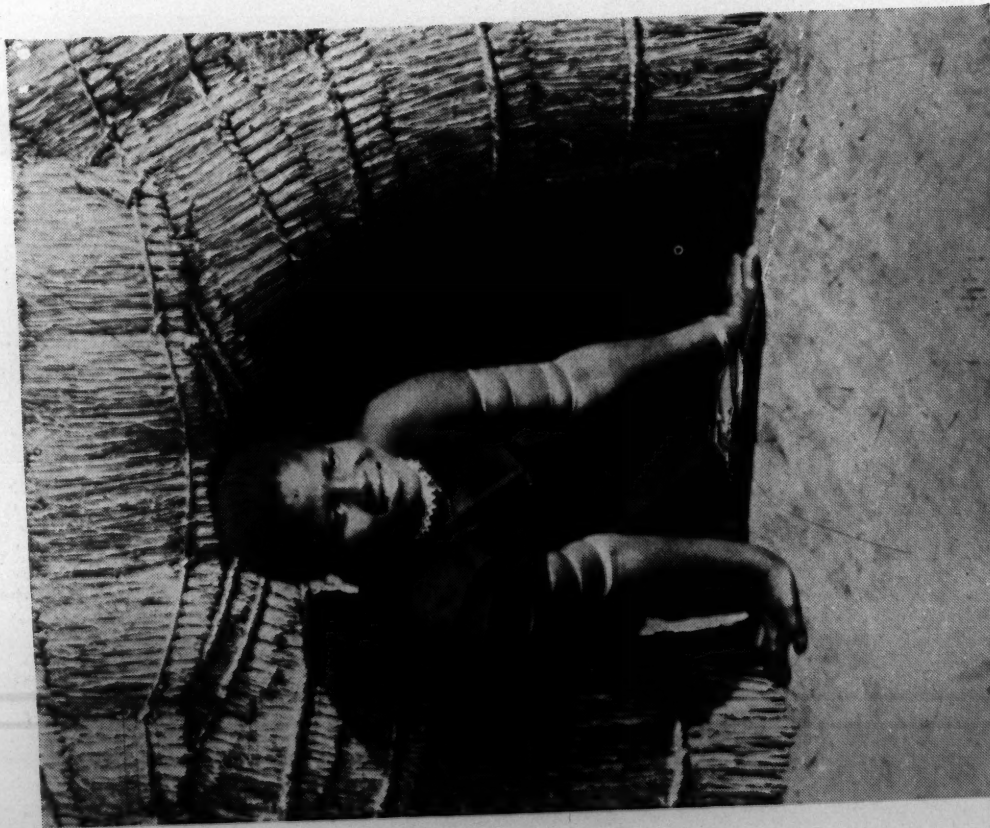
From *Zeliv*, the Zulu film, shown at the London Polytechnic.



Zeliv is remarkable chiefly for the physical beauty of the types.



The result of a plot against *Zeliw*. He is accused of casting a spell on the village and is tied to the Tree of Torture—a black Sebastian.



From *Zeliv*. Mdbuli, the heroine. Her attractiveness is evident and her buoyancy is no less pronounced.



From *Zeliv*. Nomazindela and his father plan against Zeliv to win Mdbuli.



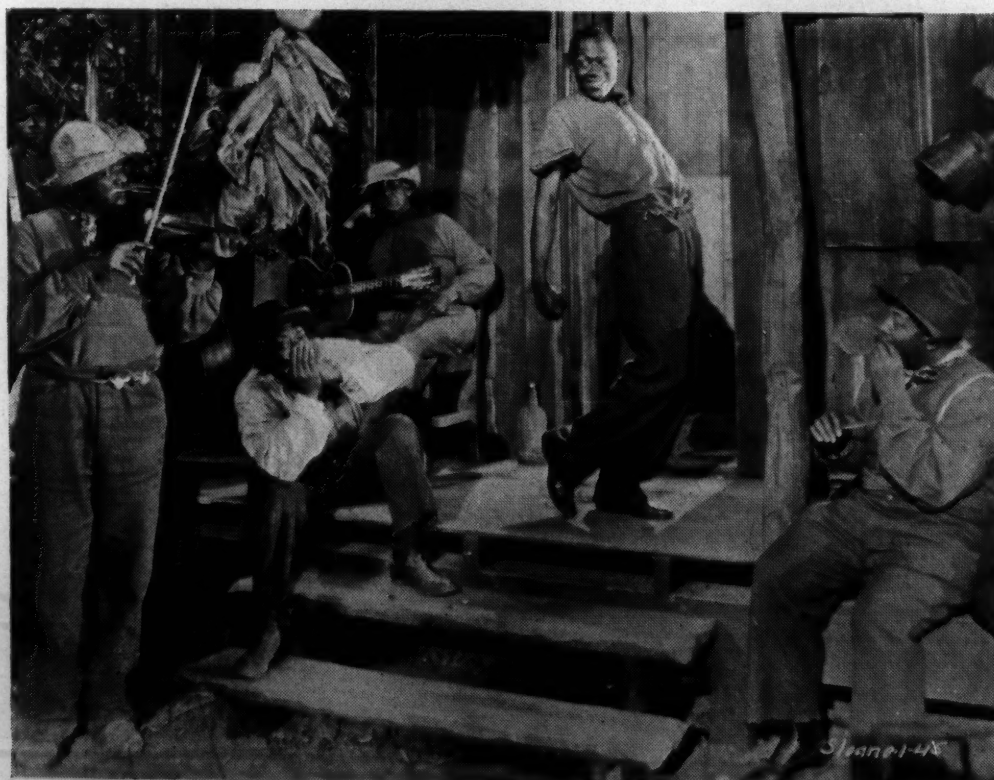
Under the Southern Cross, a film of the maoris made in the environs of the volcano Rua-Taniwha. See article *London and The Negro Film* in this issue.



Photos : Courtesy of High Commissioner for New Zealand



From *Hearts in Dixie*, an all-talking Fox Movietone production, with all-negro cast. Stepin Fetchit as the lazy-man, carries off the laurels. Decidedly to be seen, if for Fetchit alone.





Stephin Fetchit in Fox's Dancing, Singing and Dialogue Picture,
Hearts in Dixie.



Uncle Tom's Cabin, the first venture in Hollywood to star negroes,
with James B. Lowe as Uncle Tom and Gertrude Howard as Aunt
Chloe.



Pori, a recent film made in central Africa by Ufa. A robot ideal seems indicated in the dress of the three belles below.



CLOSE UP

But as he is more negroid than anything else a certain interest that attaches to him as a victim of the white man's schemes for expansion may not after all put him quite out of bounds.

Throughout the film we are given the customs, the arts, and the frenzied dances of the two tribes, but all this fails to give us the intimacy, a sensitive appreciation of the dawns of mind in these primitive children as did "Nionga", or as was particularly exemplified in "Chang".

In "Nionga" the cruelties and torturous practices of the natives took on new meaning and human importance. Out of superstitious beliefs that had been preserved simply because they had continued to serve them well, had grown a tradition, a crude morality, a preparedness of the individual for self-sacrifice—even to death by burning—for the benefit of the tribe. Incomprehensible to most of us of different experience and different knowledge, no doubt, but no more incomprehensible than the cruel proscriptions and persecutions of our day will be to future generations.

But in "Under the Southern Cross" details of the natives' practices and customs have been taken and pieced together upon a framework of screen conventions. The significance of the "tapu"—an important thread in the theme—is negated by the introduction of an hen-pecked male, to cite a single deviation, who is pulled by the ear for ogling lasciviously at the owner of a pair of heaving but comely hips. A phenomenon, by all the signs, he witnessed at least once every day of his life and, therefore, one which would occasion no sudden interest even if his mind were free

CLOSE UP

from the powerful influence of the tribal "tapu". Such direction cannot fail to put a false value over the whole film nor escape the inevitable consequence of reducing the granduer of the surroundings to mere decoration. Quite possibly the inspired source of such tampering is alike responsible for the Maori self-consciousness before the camera when registering an eroticism quite different from its habit. The simplicity, the charming indifference to the camera is gone, there is instead the self-awareness of very inferior screen actors possessed of an intelligent grasp of what every crank of the camera handle means.

Although the film is thus robbed of one of its most attractive ingredients, some pictorial moments, at least, are saved to us. There stands out particularly the scenes when Patita paddles across the lake in the dead of night to keep secret tryst with Miro who, as a pending bride, should, in accordance with the "tapu" remain confined to the "tapu hut" where eyes of love may not rest upon her. With the exception perhaps of a bunch of moonlit glistening ponies in "Dracula" never has the screen given us the eerie visibility of night so beautifully free from artificiality. A still from these sequences would have been a treasure, but such treasures were not to be unearthed in Wardour Street.

No amount of pictorial perfection can however, remit the unpardonable sin of tight-lacing saga and primitive folk lore into the already insufferable form of the white man's screen conventions. To prevent this sort of thing it will, probably for the first time in history, be possible to count on the box-office returns as an ally. Such is the peculiarity of appeal in

CLOSE UP

this type of film that the hybrid offspring of such methods as, it seems, are now beginning to be applied to them, will not only have lost their *raison d'être* but with it the very power to attract sufficient numbers to balance the box-office ledger.

HAY CHOWL:

ELSTREE'S FIRST "TALKIE"

At midnight on Friday, June 22, in *This Year of Grace*, 1929, the world's greatest talking picture made its bow to the jaded journalist at the Regal Cinema, Marble Arch, London, England.

Personally, long before I went, I knew it was the most magnificent talkie ever made. A fortnight had elapsed without us having a "greatest ever," and the event was about ten days overdue.

So *Blackmail*, British International's first full-length talkie, made at Elstree, had an auspicious premiere. Even the poor critic received an invitation to refreshments afterwards. That, of course, constitutes the all-in-all of the English trade show.

Strangely enough, the times were not otherwise out of joint. No comets had been seen for some months, despite

CLOSE UP

furious trunk calls by the Elstree Press department; no new stars had been discovered. The Copernican theory was unaffected by the event. Einstein, speaking relatively, is said to have regarded the affair as being of no celestial importance, although it has been suggested in certain quarters that Mercury's eccentric orbit veered slightly towards the Earth that night.

There was the usual jam, of course. At least one critic arrived, after a desperate stud hunt, to find that the best seats were filled by friends of the men who trimmed the spotlights, maiden-aunts of the supers who appeared in the artistically-focussed backgrounds, or travellers for the firm who hoped to reap a fortune from the bookings of the masterpiece.

There was a hush in the air. Time, particularly when the show was twenty minutes late, began to drag very slowly. After a grinding of needles and flickering of backcloths we were treated to an "acceptable programme fill-up" in which a gentleman in evening dress informed a lady in ditto ditto that he was hers for ever and for aye, a fact which was repeated a number of times during the singing of the lengthy ditty.

The audience applauded politely, and adjusted their ties for the more serious dish awaiting them. General managers and company promoters were observed to fidget, small part players were getting excited, assistant cameramen were ready, elbow advanced, to point out their own particular close-up to their admiring relatives.

One critic looked at his watch and yawned. When it was all over the process was repeated. The Press

CLOSE UP

maintaining the reputation Paramount has just given them in that direction, crowded to the Lounge, which looked like the Battle of Hohenlinden. In the background were the waitresses, like the Iser, rolling rapidly.

Flashlight photographers did their stuff, the Elstree stars obtained a due meed of publicity for waiting up half the night, the men who once walked on in a picture made fifteen years ago wrought havoc around the refreshments, the ladies who supply the loungers in our cabaret sequences grabbed the sandwiches.

A dozen critics looked at their watches and grabbed taxicabs.

* * *

And so to *Blackmail*. Alfred Hitchcock had finished the picture at the time the talkie wave broke. Frenzied conferences resulted in his re-shooting most of it and making it into a dialogue picture.

It must be said at the outset that, considering that he was toying with a medium about which we knew nothing, considering he had a finished picture to doctor into a talkie, considering his star could not speak English and had to be "ghosted" throughout, he has made a good job of it.

Blackmail is perhaps the most intelligent mixture of sound and silence we have yet seen. It is not a great picture, it is not a masterpiece, it not an artistic triumph, it is not a valuable addition to the gallery of the world's great films, it is not even, I think, a great box-office picture.

But it is a first effort of which the British industry has every reason to be proud. It is Hitchcock's come-back.

CLOSE UP

While seeing it you can hardly believe that it was made by the man who gave us *Champagne* or *The Manxman*.

For perhaps the first time in the history of the commercial cinema we are faced with a good film based on a dreadful play. Usually, however low the stage, the screen can be depended upon to go one lower.

As is usual in the more serious Hitchcock pictures, all considerations are secondary to the Almighty German Technique. If you shoot up a stairway you must tilt your camera until the result looks like Gertrude Stein reduced to a cross-word puzzle. If you want to show a Flying Squad car in full blast you begin by showing a revolving wheel and draw away until you run parallel to the car. Very clever, of course. Yet Hitchcock has a way—at his best—of justifying his weaknesses.

The first reel is silent. The dialogue is in arithmetic progression with the speed of the picture. The story, which is too thin from the commercial angle, and too inane from the artistic, concerns a detective in the Flying Squad whose girl murders an artist who attempts to seduce her. He is put on the case, sees she knows something about it, keeps back his evidence, and is blackmailed by a goal-bird. He rather cleverly succeeds in making a suspect of the blackmailer who, releasing his record, runs from the police and is killed through falling through to the Dome of the British Museum!

The girl, by this time, resolves to confess, and goes to Scotland Yard, where the detective, returned from turning over the corpse, tells her everything is cleared up and butts in very effectively on her confession. The last we see or hear

CLOSE UP

of them is their laughter as they talk to the policeman on reception duty.

An altogether inconsequential theme for a good picture. Yet Hitchcock succeeds in wedding sound with silence. He has one sequence which, despite the way it has been glorified in the English press, gives one a clear idea of the potentialities of the medium. The girl overhears a chatterbox discussing the murder, while the memory of the knife is still fresh in her penny-dreadful mind. The talk dies down and down until only the word "knife" emerges, stabbing, hurting.

Inasmuch as that particular sequence is about the only one we have on record in which sound has been definitely instrumental in the development of the drama, the picture is worthwhile.

Hitchcock's Cockney humour adds to its appeal. A scene in the Underground Railway, satirical sequences in a Lyons Corner House, an altogether delightful portrait of a charwoman by Phyllis Monkman, give the film a vividness which makes it fascinating. A remarkably clever study of a C.I.D. man, played by an ex-detective, is a delight to watch. It passed without comment in the Press.

* * *

Within twenty-four hours of the show being over, the optimists were predicting an immediate revival in British production. *Blackmail* has put us on top of the world. Pudovkin is dead, Eisenstein has ceased to be. Even Carl Laemmle, a greater figure than either, is forgotten for the moment!

We shall see.

HUGH CASTLE.

COMMENT AND REVIEW

IN THEIR INFANCY.

Now that a few months have elapsed, and please note that it is only a matter of a few months, it may be less indiscreet to tell of an early British effort to make a talkie.

The cameraman nearly fainted when he found that he would have to shoot through glass, and he moaned about distortion and fuzziness. When somebody mentioned panning he just cried. The sound expert was distant, he asked the cameraman if he had ever heard of a glass shot. In reply he got: for a glass shot the glass is at least twelve feet from the camera, and optical glass is employed. The sound expert had provided PLATE GLASS, which is greenish. The cameraman turned his handle—after refusing all responsibility for the negative.

Would you not have thought that the cameraman and the sound expert would have talked things over before they attempted something which was at the time quite new?

Good old British films!

In those early days the sound expert had it all his own way, people were too new to the game to say him nay, and the photographers were taking close-ups with a six-inch lens!

CLOSE UP

One of the most amazing sights I have ever seen was the removal of jambed film from a synchronized camera. The motor, which also worked the sound recording apparatus, had been powerful enough to keep the handle grinding to the end of the shot: and the timid cameraman, although he had heard suspicious noises, had been too frightened to speak and spoil everything for a false alarm. Any hard-working conjurer who had every taken pride in removing coloured paper from a boy's mouth would have crept away to shoot himself.

O.B.

HANDS.

We arrived early for the projection of a film and somebody else was running through an American two-reeler.

Miss Stella Simon's ballet of hands is in three movements; prelude, variations, and finale. By hands alone, by hands against black backgrounds, by hands against white backgrounds, by hands moving in constructivist scenery, Miss Simon has attempted. Hands are massed in the corners of the screen, hands reach down into the picture, hands slither at the fringes of the screen, hands glide, undulate, dance formally. *Pas de deux*; fingers flirt, meet, caress. The screen is divided into odd figures. From behind shimmering curtains, HANDS.

We feel the experiment to be of interest. Why cannot our amateurs attempt instead of busying themselves with

CLOSE UP

comedies and dramas? (See the amateur page in any popular film journal). Miss Simon should be encouraged to re-make with her empirical knowledge. For instance we suggest that it was a mistake to move the dancers behind the constructivist ridges, it made us conscious of the people behind the hands. The background could be moved effectively, or the camera, or the hands themselves are at liberty to reach up and out, but the dancers should forget all but HANDS.

We were pleased and surprised that Miss Simon has not favoured double exposure. There are no tricks on the films apart from justifiable prism shots at the finale.

A short with a provocative beauty.

O.B.

FRAULEIN ELSE.

Directed by PAUL CZINNER.

Good evening, Miss Bergner! Good evening, Miss all-dressed-up Bergner! All dressed-up and seven reels to go!

Sorrow will do something to the Bergner. The pearls, the hair, and the hands are very nice, but sorrow may give us *the woman*; at least it will be a present for *the actress*.

To jump to where the film should start but does not; the evening when the Bergner has to approach Albert Steinrück because her father, Albert Bassermann, has crashed on a phoney speculation. And Albert Steinrück and Albert Bassermann because Schnitzler is so far only a name on the credit titles.

CLOSE UP

She has been snubbing the financier. She and he. Elizabeth and Albert. She and he; sorrow with promise of more to come. Her father pleads; begs; begs her to approach the financier friend for a loan. But you have read the book, you are interested only in seeing the way she tries to ask a man she has snubbed for the loan of a small fortune.

He turns, he sees her, she walks in the opposite direction. He turns to catch her following him in the corridor, in the cocktail bar, in the lounge. What is it all about? And the mother at home runs for a doctor. The father will be arrested! fear brings on a fit. He lies panting on a bed. The crumpled collar has been thrown on the floor. Telephone to my daughter. She will help me. A vision (such a dreadful vision!) of the Bergner leading her father across a bridged ravine.

After the vision the Bergner goes to a dance. She ought to go to the cinema to forget her troubles. She would love films if THAT vision impresses her.

A flower on the shoulder of a gown, a twisted handkerchief. Her father will have the money by morning if But you have read the book, you are interested only in seeing the way she tries to live up to the vision, that dreadful vision!

The film, as I have already said, should have started here; then, if Mr. Czinner had still felt it absolutely necessary to show us the ease and pearls of her home life, he ought to have cut back. Things happen so quickly, when moments must have seemed hours of torture to a girl about to run naked into a crowded gambling room. To be driven to an act of folly, the pearls, the hands and the hair would have to begin to hate themselves.

CLOSE UP

The book conveyed the climax of each moment, this film could have done it by re-grouping of material, by flashing back and breaking up. The sense of oppression going on and on. Pick up a cloak, throw off a cloak in the gambling room, throw off a cloak to stand naked before the man who considers that a price.

There is a fine handling of big scene, of the springing to horror of the great hotel like a maiden aunt visually outraged in the rue de Lappe.

The page-boys, the porters, the retired army gentry whisper the tale in corners. It might have started here, and cut across; network of words, thoughts, deeds.

It is told far too stolidly!

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

PARIS SHORTS AND LONGS.

We fell out of the Cinéma des Agriculteurs in Paris after we had seen *Passion and Death of Joan of Arc* for the second time, expecting any minute to be urged on by attendants armed with extra-spikey maces. After our mind had been so cruelly bullied we resigned our body.

The flies tortured Joan!

It was a prologue, in our evening, to a programme of shorts. Mechanical music throbbed with the same intensity during a nature film about fish. We waited for a Dreyer close-up of a fish shedding tears!

CLOSE UP

Festivals of short films are quite everyday occurrences; the French have an appetite for documents. We found *Shanghai* too long, yet it was made with more thought than most topicals. The casual way it was joined together indicated the casual way one gets to know a city. Claud Lambert did good work with *Voici Marseilles*; although a great deal of credit is due to the town, and the architects who designed it, and the boats which pleasantly grimed it with smoke, and the men and women who achieved such dangerous looking corners.

In *Togo*, P. Marty has made a touching little attempt at Pudovkin cutting. He recapitulates all that he has said by flashes, giving the certitude that he wants to demonstrate his position as a *jeune cinéaste* rather than drive home any moral.

"These films," somebody will ask us, "are they very important?"

A great many of the new French shorts are not, but then do you, or do you not, want to be *in the movement*?

Souvenirs de Paris, by Duhamel, is boring, but it is classed as avant-garde because full use is made of a silver mannequin halating in a modiste's window, and there is a ride in a métro. (See Herring in *Close Up*, Vol. IV. No. 5). Duhamel has made another short called *Paris Express*, this is owned by Studio Films, the excellent and courageous group managed by Pierre Braunberger. We have nothing but honeyed adjectives for everything that this group stands for. However, may we be allowed a few prejudices?

Rythme d'une Cathédrale, by R. Landau, has titles superimposed on the film itself; generally echoing the image with

CLOSE UP

a tautological bang. It is quite amusing to travel about, and up, and round a cathedral while sitting in a seat, and we are getting acclimatized to the *avant garde* trick of turning the camera to pep upon ordinary scene; nevertheless, it could have been so much more. We are no poet, but the rhythm of a cathedral might be to us a Viking sea thundering round the ears, or etcetera.

We thank the language for that etcetera for we hate to criticize, still we definitely do not like shots which say, "Come here and look", we would rather potter by ourself in the sun and nose bits out. And there might have such beautiful imagery in the titles!

Vie Heureuse is a happy document on the *plage*. "An indiscretion", says a title. The sunshade and two legs. Yes, but two men!

And how they hissed and shrilled cat-calls! The private showing of Deslaw's *Parnasse* at the studio 28 was exceptionally exciting. The old, old streets seen diagonally, the old close-ups of old dolls, the old play with advertisements, but quite a new and vigorous reception from the audience. They would stand for a section of *Parnasse's* celebrities, hoping to see themselves, but the rest of the picture they hailed as the bunk.

The oppression of the day before; due to Dreyer's insistence, was forgotten; the merry spectacle of *jeune cinéastes* hissing was worth the pilgrimage to Paris. We wished we could have taken them on with us to see Renoir's *Tournoi*. They would not pass in sedate silence the moustaches and beards that look as if they had been cut out from the nursery rug. (A knight in armour who wants to

CLOSE UP

sit down for a second's rest must have been amusing even to his contemporaries!) In spite of the costumes from the local theatrical dealer *jeune cinéastes* would certainly admire the lights on the chess-board floors, and the white plumes streaking out against grey clouds.

Nobody "in the movement" would dare to laugh at *Chien Andalou*, a SURREALIST film by Bunuel. We were scandalized into attention at the outset by a close-up of an eye being gouged out by a razor. We were told that this scene was taken in a slaughter house . . . The man dressed in peculiar garb, suggesting the child combined with blinkers of a horse, rides down the street on a bicycle. He collapses outside the woman's house. She takes him in, and unlocks his tie and collar from a box he wears across his chest.

It is difficult to follow threads consciously which are meant to appeal to our subconscious. We bridge over to symbols for purity, and homosexuality, but so much effort is spent in making the bridge that we cannot catalogue.

We recall the man looking from the window at a boy in the street who has lost a wax hand. The boy cannot move, in a nightmare, a car runs over him. The man consoles himself with the woman. He rubs her breasts and the shot dissolves to the woman nude, then to the woman's buttocks. She flies from him. He tugs at a rope to follow. Attached to the rope are two grand pianos and two parsons lying flat on the floor.

The woman manages to close a door on the man. His hand is caught. Ants swarm over it.

The woman makes-up her lips; ants swarm from the man's mouth.

CLOSE UP

A friend helps him by standing him punitively in a corner, a bible in one hand, a school-book in the other. The friend is shot

This picture means something individually, and we hope that the Film Society will give us a chance to see it for a third time, for we would go up to twenty times to review a real SURREALIST production!

O.B.

THREE RUSSIAN FILMS.

Dziga Vertoff's *Man with a Movie Camera*. In Paris. Can we see it? Naturally. And would you like to see *The Eleventh Year* and *L'Appetit Vendu*?

Thus we were received by Mr. Carlovitch, who looks after Russian films in Paris, and we want to thank him specially for his great courtesy and kindness.

The Eleventh Year opens with shots from an aeroplane; rocks and sea drifting by. Mines. Three lines of movement; men and lorries on a road, bridge, and under an archway. That is so careful there must have been a reason for taking us up in the air. Ah! we are going under the ground. Humping up into the skyline a hillock, belted with machine band of workers carrying lanterns and picks. We are going under the ground. The flapping mouth of a coal scoop swings by us. We had to go up into the air to realize what it means to go under the ground. Above the

CLOSE UP

black and white smoke from the furnaces a giant miner hammering; time that is passing but not time that is lost. These men are working for their own ideal (whether we agree with it or not), working for a land of new codes. There is something fine and beautiful, caught chronographically in the sweat gleaming arm of a stoker; indeed these machines do not ask for our opinion.

The screen is split horizontally into two long-shots; one moves away, the other is static. It is magnificently done. Men walking home; away from the mines but the ideals in their homes. They are building an electric station for their state. The black and white smoke is building. (Women and children in the hay fields are building by releasing men for the more skilled work). There are no obstacles to the willing; rocks are blasted to black and white smoke; smoke that builds.

Waters of the river rise to augment the electricity; rise by means of constructed dams. The town is seen under water; the one unifying idea. Windmill is seen under water (You remember the still?) The village that has set out with one purpose; any village of the new order.

It is surprising how long we can watch, how long we can watch the women making hay and the electrician climbing a telegraph pole with knives clamped to his boots. Perhaps we are already taking a personal interest in the village?

Then we see the factory chimneys through the corn, in case we forget the linking-up. Factory chimneys are themselves a corn field, with black and white ripples of smoke.

A ballet of telegraph wire (you remember the still?) suggesting the work inside the factory.

CLOSE UP

We must not forget, either, the activity under the ground. Pit ponies are as sturdy as the heavy rafters in the roof. Change of camera angle makes the rafters wrench with the ponies, drawing the eye to the quiet workers as the beasts draw the loads. And the lifts go up, to emphasize the men who stay below.

We leave them with a man with a drill, it brings vitality and truth to the abstract arrangements of the avant-garde.

Women at the pit-heads lustily wheel away the trucks.

A sub-title says, "The flag of Lenin". Courageous workers hidden in masks. So the flag of Lenin is a bright shower of sparks. No silk to drape across Utopia of ease and content; something searing, dangerous and alive.

Watching over the workers, the sentinel.

Wake of a boat, taken romantically from sea level. Sailors. A head and rifle against the cylinder curve of a waterfall. *One picture one turn* shot of the sky gives shredded clouds.

A sub-title says, "The Flag of Lenin". Light from the home and the clubs. The flag is always light, light to kindle or to welcome; never silk.

We build with golden light. That is the message of the picture. Streaked fingers of light sweeping over the factory floor. Bars of red hot metal, and coiled metal shavings doing things one finds in the work of Bruguière.

Men marching up skyline, up the hillock; and smoke from the factory chimneys balancing the corner of the composition. Where there is no smoke the tripod is tilted to give balance.

It is grand propaganda. We are quite impartial but only a stone could remain unmoved. The machinery and men

CLOSE UP

working in harmony for something which they believe to be better. "Towards socialism", says a title. The factories, the women, the children. "Towards a world socialism", says a title. The art of the director does the rest. Final, clashing chords of a symphony. There it is, whether you like it or not.

The Man with A Movie Camera is lighter than *The Eleventh Year*. M. Kaufman is again the operator and Swilowa again helps with the cutting.

Berlin and Rien Que les Heures! Forget all that. To begin with here is a Russian typewriter. Russian customs and habits, that alone puts it apart. Then there is a freedom from the usual smirkiness. The birth of a child is shown without the coyness of *Nature and Love*. Birth and death are being contrasted; the face of the mother is cross cut with linen face of the corpse; the mother's twitching lips and nostrils, the calmness of death. It is brought out that death is terrible and birth a conquest. It would be a joy to any new woman, not a shock.

Forget the other documents, for Vertoff has the idea of making you conscious of the camera. The lens racks out and in, the scene comes into focus; the lens racks out and in and the eye of the cameraman is in the lens. The eye of the camera, the eye of the cameraman, and the eye of the camera recording it all.

We were reminded of a scene in *The Postmaster*, where the daughter is dressing for a party in front of an oval mirror which the cameraman frames in the black circle of an iris: another mirror, the mirror of the screen.

CLOSEUP

An accidental effect; Vertoff's are minutely devised. He stops the film at a certain point to show a photograph of the film, cutting to a joining girl at work on the first copy. Rolls of the scenes we have just seen glint from the neat shelves. A woman driving along the streets, petrified to a single frame in the film strip of the woman driving along the streets. Long shot from the roof of a house; a camera pans down into the picture. A cameraman climbs a girder. We see him taking a picture, we see the picture he has taken. We are frightened for his safety and frightened for the safety of the unseen cameraman. Astral projection of self!

The film is different! A doll in a shop window; so, so threadbare. Vertoff catches shadows from a tree outside which put breath into the china throat. Shutters, and views through the slats; so, so threadbare. Vertoff cross cuts with a young lady blinking sleepy-dust eyes; eyes open and shut in a twinkling, slats twinkle.

Vertoff's first reel is devoted to people entering a cinema; to the projectionist threading up his apparatus; to seats in the cinema being occupied, one by one, by invisible patrons.

A girl is asleep. There is a ring on her finger. Wind stirs in an empty cafe. The cafe where she gained the ring? She sleeps. Children sleep. Down-and-outs sleep. The town sleeps. They all have a right to sleep.

The cameraman sets out for the day. He stretches himself across a railway line. There is a thrill as the train swoops down. The woman still sleeps.

The streets are washed, the girl washes. A relaxation for the cameraman. Not for long. He rides on a fire engine. He finds an attractive fountain. Because we are constantly

CLOSE UP

reminded of the camera we cannot complain of the contrived; for instance, of the way in which the fountain is turned on a moment after it is discovered by the eye of the camera.

As in *The Eleventh Year* there is a good deal of footage devoted to factories, light splashed tunnels of miners, and great chimneys blowing smoke rings.

We come back to the morning streets. Hand of policeman, hand of motor horn, in lightning cuts; mixed first, with the lens of a camera, then with a gigantic eye.

Finally, we watch the audience, watching the screen on which are scenes we saw being taken by a cameraman whom we knew was being himself taken by Vertoff's Debie. The *montage* is stupendous and leaves most of the accredited masterpieces in some vague category with the Asquith person. The propaganda, without the stern beauty of *The Eleventh Year*, is a little too stormy, the contrasts between the wealthy woman enjoying a manicure and the manual worker being obvious and tiresome.

The work of Vertoff is no longer legendary. We have seen it, others have seen it. Everybody must fight till they do see it!

L'Apetit Vendu is what Henry Dobb called a custard-pie melodrama. We began by wondering, "Will the Russians laugh at this?" Two men after the girl in the cafe, giving musichall twiddles to their hats and canes. Does this amuse Russians? The poor man wants to marry the girl. The scenario livens up when a millionaire, with bad digestive organs, offers the poor man a sum down for his stomach.

Every kind of garnished dish is offered by Folies-Bergèresque girls to the re-stomached capitalist. The

CLOSE UP

worker, meanwhile, is taken ill mysteriously in the train. He hangs out of an open door, managing to lodge his feet pretty firmly.

Exercises and doctors fail to alleviate his pains. He attempts suicide. The girl hopes to revive his interest in life by forcing him to return to his old occupation, that of a bus driver.

Four men crowd into a telephone box, the bus charges straight for it. Pedestrians dive into a fountain, a policeman continues to direct the traffic with his head half out of the water.

The peculiar end of it all is that the bus heads into a wall, the driver is killed and the capitalist dies at the same moment.

We understand that the picture has been booked for the Vieux-Colombier, we hope that some of the French critics may be able to tell us if it is a comedy, satire, tragedy, propaganda or WHAT? With the trade papers we can merely call it *good entertainment*.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

LA CHUTE DE LA MAISON USHER.

After we had seen, and loved, *Finis Terrae* we could not rest until we had "visioned" *La Chute de la Maison Usher*. Owing to the enterprise of Mr. Stuart Davis the picture will be brought to London.

Clusters of candles burn in the halls of Usher, candles

CLOSE UP

that get outside the oneness of the picture and light it again.

The man picks up a guitar to still the draperies that billow out from the passage windows, to stay the books that float in unearthly motion from the stacked shelves. Excellent use of slow motion to create atmosphere. The music is unheard and the sounds of the house unheard but the poetry of it, and in it, is felt. That is something so much greater.

The candles are ever in the foreground, if they were extinguished one believes that the screen would blacken.

A visitor for the House of Usher. The damp greyness of the sky and the screen is as a sheet of blotting paper. One could crumple up those pools and clouds. The castle itself a model, matching in badly with the exteriors. Visitors' feet (it is not our fault that directors are obsessed with feet) seek the castle. Puddles to be skirted, something to do besides watch the feet.

Murk and gloom in the blotting paper landscape.

Candles and through them a paint-brush. Has the hand painted the candles to light the hand painting the woman? Artistic composition is so cardinal, so exquisite, one finds it hard to believe.

The driver of the coach is riding away, and we want to see what is happening to the visitor. Good dramatic composition.

He sees the portrait of the wife, the portrait which lives while the woman (Marguerite Abel Gance) dies, the portrait which drains the life from her.

Coffin with flowing white draperies. Candles double exposed, draperies, doors round which white lace flutters, lake to be crossed, with unearthly candles and flowing

CLOSE UP

draperies. Here is a real understanding for double exposure, it is poignant. Nature takes part in the funeral. Leaves sweep out of a door.

In *Seize et demi Onze*, an early and bad Epstein from a story by Marie Epstein, Van Daele drives along a road close to the sea with Suzy Pierson, while water is superimposed in different absurd manners; but in *La chute de la Maison Usher* super-impression has a Mary Butts' quality; the drapery in the candles fanned by the wind and the flames of the lace. Mystic intenseness.

"Not one nail," says the man, "must be placed in coffin."

He is led from the cave and the hammer falls.

Stars in the sky form a cross. Storm. The house of Usher is to perish. Cross of the sky marks the grave of a race. A night for the dead, a night for black magic

The magic, be it black or white, belongs to Epstein.

We scribbled these notes on the margin of a synopsis; we do not intend to enlarge on them because every *Close-Up* reader must go himself to see.

O.B.

EROTIK.

MANUSCRIPT AND DIRECTION BY GUSTAV MACHATY.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY W. WICH.

SETS BY BORSODY, MACHON, HACKENCHMIED.

A production by Von Stroheim's assistant, with the title *Erotik!*

CLOSE UP

Although it is not a talkie we can say, "That sounds good."

Young man (Olaf Fjord) gets stranded on a railway station. The station-master (S. Sleichert) invites him into the house to dry himself.

Rain against telephone wires, drip in pool, a last corpulent drop on the window pane. Rain through the night . . . The details are clever. The young man opens his bag and takes out a bottle of perfume, which he applies to his lips and ears.

Struck "all of a heap" the station-master questions the expedience of perfume for young men; whereupon the young man produces a bottle of whisky about which there can be no question.

A cigarette is lit from a patent affair, thereby intriguing the simple station-master. The young man presents it to his host, a generous action which secures—and was intended to do so—an invitation for the night.

A simple station-master intrigued by patent lighters, harbouring a young man with sophisticated scents in his bag, is bound to be the father of a cinema daughter, and Ita Rina makes an attractive job of it.

The father is called away on some kind of night duty.

"Don't," says the girl, "forget anything, father."

He does not forget to take the bottle of whisky with him.

To even things up the boy forces the perfume on the girl, who practises with it in the secrecy of her chamber. Nobody troubles to tell her that the name of the perfume is *Erotik!*

The seduction scene is astonishingly well done. Big-heads; severed noses, mouths, eyes. We are all fond of

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CLOSE UP

chocolates but we cannot eat them because they make us sick, but Mr. Machaty uses these chocolate-box close-ups so that they really become erotic.

The film stales. The girl's child is born dead. She drifts to the city where the man has many mistresses. Humour of the Menjou brand to eke it out.

"Where have you been?" splutters enraged husband.

"With my lover," says the woman gaily.

The husband roars with laughter, and the audience is expected to compete as they have been allowed to see the woman, half an hour earlier, holding out her arms to the indifferent young man.

Machaty is soaked in Hollywood tradition (there is a cabaret sequence) but . . . there is that BUT.

This native picture from Prague was exhibited at Stuttgart.

O.B.

HOLLYWOOD NOTES.

"The Devastating Power of Gossip" has been awarded the grand prize of a thousand dollars in the Cecil de Mille prize contest for the best idea for a talking picture. The author of this homely, yet pregnant suggestion is Marie Loscalzo, of New York. The contest excited widespread interest and resulted in the submission of many thousands of ideas—each limited under the rules to two hundred and fifty words. Several minor awards were made; two of them

CLOSE UP

going to foreign contestants—Heather McCleary, of Edmonton, Canada, and Spitzer Jenö, of Budapest.

* * *

The Actors Equity Association, a union of stage players, has been seeking to unionize the Hollywood screen actors. The attempt appears to have been prompted by the fatuous belief that the talkies cannot succeed without the established thespians of the stage, who have recently been flocking to Hollywood in great numbers. The leaders of the film colony, while welcoming these recruits to the screen, very emphatically resent their effort to impose the restrictions of the stage union upon cinema production. Film work has its own highly specialized and peculiar conditions, and is not in the main amenable to the rules and impositions applicable to stage work.

* * *

C. Sil-Vara, the European playwright, is one of the latest of Hollywood's acquisitions. He has arrived here from London, under contract with M-G-M, to write talkie plays directly for the screen.

* * *

Hereafter United Artists pictures will be released through the Paramount-Lasky distribution system. This means that the Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Charlie Chaplin, Norma Talmadge and Gloria Swanson pictures, as well as the D. W. Griffith and Samuel Goldwyn productions, will henceforth enjoy a much wider outlet than heretofore, while at the same time Paramount's prestige will be increased. Preceding this arrangement, plans had been under way for a merger of United Artists and Warner Brothers; but

CLOSE UP

mutually satisfactory terms could not be agreed upon, and the contemplated merger was abandoned.

* * *

Three Live Ghosts is under way at United Artists studio. The picture (a talkie, of course) is based upon Max Marcin's popular stage play, depicting the adventures of three men who escape from a German prison and return to their former haunts in London, to discover themselves officially dead in the eyes of the government. The character of the shell-shocked "Spoofy" is portrayed by the English actor Claud Allister. The other two "ghosts" are Beryl Mercer and Charles McNaughton, both of whom have also been identified with the London stage.

* * *

The marked success of M-G-M's *Broadway Melody*, their initial talking-and-singing picture, has inspired them to a second like effort under the title of *The Hollywood Revue*. This is a far more elaborate and ambitious production than the first, with all of the elements of popularity emphasized. *Broadway Melody*, in Hollywood alone, enjoyed a continuous run of six months, with two showings daily.

* * *

Maurice Chevalier's *Innocents of Paris* is to be followed by *The Love Parade*. This musical extravaganza will be directed by Ernst Lubitsch. The story is based upon the European play, *The Prince Consort*, by Leon Xanrof and Jules Chancel, and, according to the announcement of its producers, Paramount-Lasky, will bring a new type of musical entertainment to the audible screen, as well as

CLOSE UP

optical nuances in the shape of ultra-modern settings and unique camera effects.

* * *

The Brazilian Southern Cross Productions is one of Hollywood's newer film companies. Its first picture, *The Soul of a Peasant*, has an incidental personal interest in the fact that its featured player, Lia Tora, of Brazil, is the author of its story, and that her husband, Vicomte Julio de Moraes, directed the film.

* * *

Warner Brothers' *On With the Show*, their first all natural-color talkie, has proven so popular, that they are preparing to follow it with several others done in the new Technicolor medium. This newly developed color process presents pictures in very soft, life-like tones, with a much more restful effect on the eye than has heretofore been attainable in color films. *Song of the West* and *Gold Diggers of Broadway* are the two pictures at present under way at the Warner studios employing this recent chromatic innovation.

* * *

Hollywood has been advised by the Federal district government of Mexico City, that beginning in September no films may be shown in Mexico with English titles. They must all be in Spanish. The order makes no mention of talking pictures; but trouble in exhibiting English-speaking films is expected, in view of the opposition already being waged against them, in anticipation, by certain influential Mexican newspapers, on the ground that such pictures will

CLOSE UP

have a tendency to induce the abandonment of Spanish in favor of English. * * *

The announced intention of Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks to film a talkie version of *The Taming of the Shrew*, has inspired other producers to contemplate Shakespearean audible screen productions. Among them is Cecil de Mille, who is said to have *Hamlet* in mind. Former attempts in this field, with the silent films, proved consistently unpopular. Which would seem to indicate that Shakespeare, with his bare plots, minus the spoken word, would have proven an unsuccessful scenario writer.

* * *

The suave, debonair Adolphe Menjou of the silent pictures is to make his talkie debut in *Fashions in Love* for Paramount-Lasky. In this film he will not only speak, but will also display his talents as a singer and a pianist.

* * *

Paramount-Lasky have engaged John Galsworthy to write the dialog for the screen version of his *Escape*. Basil Deane, the British stage producer, who will come to Hollywood to direct the film, is collaborating with Galsworthy on this phase of the production. Clive Brook, another Englishman, who has already established himself in Hollywood, will be cast in the leading rôle.

* * *

And speaking of Englishmen—James Whale, recently in the public eye as the director of the London stage play, *Journey's End*, has arrived in Hollywood to join Paramount's scenario staff as an expert dialog writer.

C.H.

CLOSE UP

An interesting display of old English and American films, supplied by Mr. Leslie Wood of Apex Motion Pictures, was given by the London A.C.A. on June 19th.

Exhibit No. 1 was a 1904 Cecil M. Hepworth one-reeler, entitled *Dumb Sagacity*. This film, one of the earliest made in England, dealt with the heroic exploits of a dog, who, with the aid of a horse, rescues his young mistress from drowning when the tide comes in and leaves her stranded on a rock.

Exhibit No. 2 was a very old one-reeler made by the Cines Company of Rome, and recounted the adventures of one, Judith, who chops off the head of a tyrant, to the great joy of the assembled populace. Considerable merriment was caused by the dramatic appearance, about every half minute, of a super-imposed angel, who apparently urged the fair Judith to perform the foul deed. This film was made on an out-door set, and contained no sub-titles.

Exhibit No. 3 was the great hit of the evening, a 1909 D. W. Griffith American Biograph thriller, called *Her Wedding Bell*. Blanche Sweet was the heroine, H. B. Walthall the villain, and Mary Pickford appeared as an extra. Parallel action was used by Griffith in this one-reeler, and suspense was worked up to a terrific pitch, but unfortunately the end of the film is missing, so we do not know whether the hero arrived in time to save his bride-to-be from being blown up by the bomb, or not. If *Intolerance* tells us anything, he did, so we hope for the best.

The Mother Call was Exhibit No. 4. This was a real high-pressure domestic drama, bringing in a drunken husband, a wicked baronet who loves another, a dastardly plot

CLOSE UP

to change babies, and so forth. The producers, the old Kineto Company of England were apparently fond of sepia tinting.

Last, but by no means least, we had a two-reel drama called *A Slice of Life*, produced by the American Film Company about 1910-11. Points of interest were the parallel action, a lengthy cut-back, some excellent mixes, and the inclusion of the names of the players. The heroine, Winifred Greenwood, distinguished herself by appearing in every scene armed with an enormous bunch of roses which she distributed to all and sundry. The late Arthur Johnson played juvenile lead.

This collection of films is unique, and credit is due to Mr. Wood for obtaining and preserving them. To an amateur, especially, they afford material of great value.

A.W.

ROBERT HERRING GIVES

Four Points about *Hearts In Dixie*

The first and the second are Stephin Fetchit. His face, his dancing, his personality and his voice, which I am sure would have been very interesting if I had been able to hear more of it. Maybe the Astoria is not good on its acoustics, maybe I was sitting too near (I found the same thing in the corresponding seats at the Empire, where my experience of *BROADWAY MELODY* was that I was dozing in a traffic

CLOSE UP

block), and maybe that the microphone cannot do justice to the Negro inflections, but the fact remains that Fetchit and the others were only intermittently intelligible the night I went. It ought not to be the recording, because Jimmie Rodgers and a host of others come over well on gramophones. The women were better (the two leading women were in all ways excellent) and so were the children. It was the men's voices that blasted, and I think the intonations of Fetchit must be too subtle for talkies as yet.

For those who may in consequence have been disappointed in this first Negro talkie, I would make the third point; the film had a sentimental enough story, and the Negroes (one felt they were told to be "darkies") had to sing plantation songs, but, with the exception of these songs, it all came over so naturally and so free from hypocrisy, that one found one was for once watching a talkie free from sentimentality, which was very queer. They didn't call each other "regular guys" or "troupers;" they acted on it, quiet. In fact, the casual way things happened and the Negroes went on living their life, though it wasn't inspired, was attractive.

The fourth point. A matter of talkie technique. Fetchit does nothing about the house, and goes off dancing when his wife is ill. The grandfather sits up with the baby, crooning to it. You hear him crooning, and through the window you also hear the noise from the dancing, coming in. I liked that quite. But the real success was in the scene where the mother dies. She has been looked after by a Voodoo woman, but at last the grandfather gets in a white doctor. The doctor comes in, draws back the sheets and we hear him say "Why she's been dead three days! All the time we see

CLOSE UP

his face. Then his words cut across, "she's been dead three days." Now in a silent film, the visual thing would have been broken. The doctor's face wouldn't have been before us all the time. There would have been cutting, more or less skilful, and perhaps a subtitle. We shouldn't have had the face held, and the voice, and then again the face of the grandfather as he said "We didn't know, we didn't know." "This was the odd spectacle of talkies assisting visual continuity."

There was also, this isn't a point, just a coda, there was also a gang plank which drew up as the ship taking a boy away drew out, filling the screen and blotting out the old man who saw him off. This wasn't great, but I can remember how we should have hailed it in silent days.

It was interesting to see how the audience at *THE MAN I LOVE* completely missed a similar silent point (it was one here) because they were so intent on talking. Richard Arlen, a boxer taken up by Baclanova, arrives at her house in a lounge suit. Dressed in white, she says he is so late, and he carefully says there is an hour before dinner. They disappear round a corner, and next shot are coming down stairs, she in black and he in a dinner jacket. At once the audience murmured "How did he change?" Felt very spry at noticing, and missed something that was very akin to the famous collar of *THE WOMAN OF PARIS*. Arlen kept his clothes in that house; surely, you would have thought the implication would have been grasped?

But people are losing their picture sense in following talk. People must be careful.

CLOSE UP

HENRY DOBB GIVES

Variations on the Same Theme.

Doubtless "Hearts in Dixie" is sincere. Sincere as is possible with the state of mind that puts the Negro behind the floodlights with the ball shying booth at Coney Island and the Femmes au Plat in the Jardin d'Acclimation. But it is built on illusions, illusions that have enwrapped us since the lachrymose myths of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" span a web of sobbing sympathy around an antimacassared world.

Superficially we might have advanced since the mountebankery of "One Exciting Night," though Stepin Fetchit's rôle in the still warm "The Ghost Talks" is directly in the tradition of the American Vaudeville stage and Moore and Burgess. But the literary loud speakers of the Learned and Reverend Dr. William Fox still shriek with a more barbaric clangour than nineteen "Blackbirds" and double that number of Washboard Beaters that the Negro is something to clown and weep for us, something to do his stuff as the hamadryads on Monkey Hill. The Negro, in short, for all his humanity, is still behind the bars of the cage, a cage flooded with the glare of publicity and intoned with the "haunting strains of negro spirituals." How far are we with our Collection Paul Guillaume, and our penchant for Gauguin and the Benin head in the British Museum, from this state of mind? Is our belated cult of the coloured so removed from William Fox?

So granting that Paul Slone's film is as honest as ourselves how far do we get? How far with such illusions? For it is obvious that Slone has not yet emerged from that state of

CLOSE UP

mind which conceives of the "Hearts in Dixie" as leaning towards open necked shirts, bandanna hats and the melodic charms of "Old Black Joe" and "The Lonesome Road." Whereas those who have studied the business will assure you that they are notoriously given to Stein Bloch suitings, Dobbs Hats, "Digga Digga Doo" and "I Must Have That Man."

Nor can serious consideration be allowed to that indiscriminate ethnology, not confined to Fox Films which embraces under the category of Negro, Australian Aborigines, Pacific Islanders and blueys from St. Anns, Jamaica.

Yet there are a few kicks to be got from the film. With coloured performers of the calibre of Stepin Fetchit and Clarence Muse that was inevitable, for despite the tinsel and the gawdiness, the pathos and mountebankery to order of tradition, there is such dynamism inside them, such fires to break through that one forgets the paint and is conscious only of the power. That volcanic energy that breaks forth in the dance in the moonlight is flavoured with the intoxication of the Bal Negre of the Rue Blomet, and is abbreviated by propriety all too soon. There for once one deplored the sound on film system. With a disc it would have been all or nothing.

The Voodoo sequence too, despite its Pears Annual resemblance to the Modern Group flavour of "Porgy" has in it a hint of reality. Such are the moments, moments made magical by the puppets themselves, magical in spite of the hands that dangle the strings, that arrange this pattern of popular entertainment with its heart appeal and its sobs, its "roustabouts crooning thrilling melodies," its "beautiful

CLOSE UP

panorama of life along the levee and in the cotton fields " (I quote from Mr. Fox's loud speaker), according to the conception not of the negro but of the box office.

The tragedy is not the tragedy in the film, but the tragedy of the film: the tragedy of these untainted folk strutting their stuff to the required pattern, playing their parts as the white man likes to believe they do. The Negro and all his coloured brothers are not museum specimens. Nor are they mountebanks. If they are blessed with a more than human power of music and speech, of rhythm and colour then they have it over us mere whites. But if "Hearts in Dixie" is a specimen of coloured expression under the aegis of the White Thaumaturgists of Hollywood let us next time hand the whole process over to themselves. Whether the Negro Film Company now being initiated by Wm. Foster will suffice remains to be seen. For we have tainted the coloured man and he will find it hard to remove himself from the economic advantage of expressing not so much himself as the fellow we expect. Then the Stepin Fetchits will release themselves from that inertia which is symbolic of something more than mere physical laziness.

Then the dawn will come and we will find that maybe Stepin Fetchit and Charles (Buddy) Rodgers are brothers under the skin. *What a consolation!*

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Contents	Index
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